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## The *Real* Shakespeare





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# The *Real* Shakespeare

*A Counterblast to Commentators*

by

WILLIAM BLISS

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*“Those who love wine will drink and ask no more.”*

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LONDON: SIDGWICK & JACKSON

1947 .

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LONDON AND BECCLES

To all Shandeans and Pantagruelists,  
dead, living and yet to be born;  
to all Individualists and haters of standardisation;  
and to all true lovers of Shakespeare  
this book is dedicated.

IMPRIMATUR

*William Shakespeare*

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This book is written (as the Dedication suggests) not for the Highbrows, nor for Lowbrows, nor yet, exactly, for the Man-in-the-street, but for *l'homme moyen sensuel*, the ordinary sensuous and intelligent man who loves beauty wherever he finds it and is content to love without seeking to analyse.

Every true lover of Shakespeare must necessarily be such a man, and to him, therefore, it is particularly addressed.

The strange fact that Shakespeare, the sanest and most equable-minded of men, the most crystal-clear in thought and in expression, and the most tolerant and all-understanding, has been the cause of so much insanity, confusion, narrowness, and intolerance in so many of those who have set themselves the quite unnecessary task of interpreting him is what chiefly moved the Author and his Collaborator to write it.

Those readers—few but select—who have read the Author's *Pilgrimage of Grace* will need no introduction to *Eugenius*. Those who have not should remedy the omission.

For all the expressions of opinion, likes, dislikes, beliefs, prejudices, dogmatisms, and pontifical or oracular utterances in the book which are his own, the Author accepts full responsibility.

As to the more imaginative flights of *Eugenius*, beyond saying that they seem to him at least as well documented as, and far more logical than, any previous attempts to fill in the blank pages of Shakespeare's life, the Author prefers to accept none.

May, 1940

### POSTSCRIPT

Six years have gone by since the last chapter of this book was written in mid-May of 1940, at the moment when Norway was being swallowed up and just before France was over-run by the German armies. Six years is a long time for a man to



wait to see the child he has begotten come to life, but the delay, caused by the shortage of paper, has enabled the manuscript to be read by a good number of people who have given the Author the benefit of their suggestions and advisory criticisms. Some of those he has accepted: to some he has refused to listen. He has been urged to cut out all reference to the War so as not to 'date' the book, but as it was in fact written in those months there seems to be no good reason for not saying so.

The last chapter came in for the most criticism: it being objected that Shakespeare's appearance is incredible or that it savours of magic and forbidden arts. The Author agrees that it was an unusual happening, but that is only because the happy dead have, certainly, something much better to do than to revisit the glimpses of the moon in order to hearten their friends who are still groping about in this inconsiderable planet.

As it is quite certain, however, that if they did—or when they do—they would appear in the simple and straightforward fashion here described and not by way of ectoplasms and similar vague and crepuscular manifestations, which have always seemed to the Author to be an insult to the intelligence of the dead, he has been obstinate to leave the chapter as it was written. There is nothing very miraculous about it after all (except perhaps Shakespeare's good nature) and, as Leontes remarks in the scene from which the quotation at the head of the chapter is taken, 'If this be magic, let it be an art as lawful as eating.'

WILLIAM BLISS.

LANE END, BUCKS. *May*, 1946.

## THE SHAKESPEAREAN COMMENTATOR

*... 't has been held by many, that  
As Montaigne, playing with his Cat,  
Complains she thought him but an Ass,  
Much more she would Sir Hudibras;  
But they're mistaken very much,  
'Tis plain enough he was no such;  
We grant, altho' he had much Wit,  
H' was very shy of using it;  
As being loath to wear it out,  
And therefore bore it not about;  
Unless on Holy-days or so,  
As Men their best Apparel do,  
Beside, 'tis known he could speak Greek  
As naturally as Pigs squeak;  
That Latin was no more difficile,  
Than to a Blackbird 'tis to whistle:  
H' had hard words ready to show Why,  
And tell what Rules he did it by,  
Else when with greatest Art he spoke,  
You'd think he talked like other Folk.  
But when he pleas'd to show 't, his Speech  
In Loftiness of Sound was rich;  
A Babylonish Dialect,  
Which learned Pedants much affect;*

*• • • • •  
This he as volubly would vent,  
As though his Stock would ne'er be spent;  
And truly, to support that Charge,  
He had Supplies as vast and large;  
For he could coin or counterfeit  
New Words, with little or no Wit;  
Words so debased and hard, no Stone  
Was hard enough to touch them on,  
But when with hasty Noise he spoke 'em,  
The Ignorant for current took 'em;*

*• • • • •  
Beside, he was a shrewd Philosopher,  
And had read ev'ry Text and Gloss over:*

*Whate'er the crabbed'st Author hath,  
He understood b' implicit Faith;  
Whatever Sceptick cou'd enquire for;  
For every why he had a wherefore:  
Knew more than Forty of them do,  
As far as Words and Terms cou'd go.  
All which he understood by Rote,  
And as Occasion serv'd wou'd quote:  
No matter whether Right or Wrong,  
They might be either said, or sung.  
His Notions fitted things so well,  
That which was which he cou'd not tell;  
But oftentimes mistook the one  
For th' other, as great Clerks have done.  
He cou'd reduce all Things to Acts,  
And knew their Natures by Abstracts;  
Where Entity and Quiddity,  
The Ghosts of defunct Bodies fly;  
Where Truth in Person doth appear,  
Like Words congealed in Northern Air.  
He knew what's what, and that's as high  
As Metaphysick Wit can fly.*

HUDIBRAS

## Chapter I

### THE SHAKESPEAREAN COMMENTATOR

'Tell me, Eugenius,' I said, handing him my cigar-case (after the last of the 1896 Croft was finished), 'tell me, what is your idea of the ultimate nadir of foolishness?'

'Shakespearean commentators,' said Eugenius, without a moment's hesitation, as he selected the best of the cigars in the case.

'Come, come,' I said, taking the next best and motioning Eugenius to the cedar-slips and the wood fire, 'come, come, are not Baconians in a lower circle of hell?'

'It is a question of degree,' said Eugenius judgmentally, lighting the cedar-slip at the wood fire and cocking his eye at the flame, 'for it is merely a matter of time before the Shakespearean commentator at last, in a process as it were of mental liquefaction, sloughs down into the Baconian—the last and lowest positive-negative of human non-intelligence, and, lit (for otherwise he would be inspissately invisible) by the small phosphor-light that attends decaying matter, is seen in his final stage for what he, potentially, was at his inception.'

'You have a nice appreciation of ultimates, Eugenius,' I said. 'Why don't you translate the *Inferno*? It's never been done, you know. Not really, I mean—and you seem to have the touch.'

'I should have to delve much deeper than Dante,' said Eugenius gloomily. 'They were since his time.' He drooped his head and stared into the leaping flames. I saw his lips move . . .

'Beneath the lowest depth a lower yet'; I caught the murmur.

We smoked awhile in silence. The port induced a sort of Olympian hebetude, and through the cigar-smoke we regarded, tolerantly, the follies of mankind. 'Tolerantly . . .' I said. But suddenly Eugenius, whose thoughts had clearly been as mine, sat up, and his cigar ash was scattered.

'No! No!' he shouted. 'I am not tolerant! These things are beyond tolerance. Tolerance be damned! I am of Dogberry's mind. There is too much tolerance of folly. *'Tolerable and not to be endured!'* Dogberry spoke better than he knew! I will not endure them.'

'Nobody asked you to, my dear Eugenius,' I said mildly.

'Oh, but they did. They do,' said Eugenius, almost with tears in his voice. 'I know you were lucky. You told me once that when you were a boy they didn't shove Shakespeare down your throat so cluttered up with explanatory notes and so hedged about with Introductions and Appendices that you couldn't see the wood for the trees. You were, you told me, left to take down a volume from your father's library and make a voyage of discovery for yourself and . . .'

'It was a very nice edition, too,' I interrupted. 'Each play separate in a thin royal quarto with wide margins and clear print, *and* with lovely pictures by Sir John Somebody—I forget—wait a minute, Sir John Gilbert.'

'You were lucky. And then you told me that when you were at school and a play of Shakespeare happened to be set for your English Literature paper at the quarterly exams you were just given the plain play and your master supplied any comment upon or explanations of any word or passage that you asked him about.'

'Yes, and they weren't many,' I said; 'Shakespeare is not obscure.'

'That's just it. He isn't. He is as clear as noonday nearly always. It is they who, like cuttle-fish, obscure him with their sepia emanations,' growled Eugenius, throwing his cigar stub into the fire and staring at it malevolently, as if at a commentator burning. 'You were lucky. Why, in my time all the *Shakespeares* a boy ever saw were those beastly school *Shakespeares*, each of a separate play, where after a solemn introduction in which some ass blethered his

egregious views upon the play, there followed a thin line of text, either with marginal notes squeezing it in or (more usually) with footnotes pushing it up, till sometimes there were only half a dozen lines left to a page. And all about nothing. All either irrelevant or unnecessary. My hat! They'd take you off the text to tell you that "peevish" meant "forward", but that in Middle English "peuisch" meant "ill-natured", while "in Early English the meaning ranges from 'childish' to 'wayward'—even 'witty'", and, on top of that, add in brackets "(Derivation obscure, probably echoic)". What the deuce is "echoic", Yorick?

'It ought to mean "reverberatory",' I said. 'But perhaps he meant "onomatopæic."'

'Not he. He wouldn't have used a shorter word. Or they'd drag you from an exciting or beautiful passage to inform you gravely that "new-fangled" meant "fond of what is new", or that "virginal" meant "fresh, unspoiled", or that a "pageant" was a "show", or that to "puke" meant to "vomit", or that "what, what, what!" were "exclamations of impatience", or that "to show more bright" meant "to appear, to look, more bright", or that "power" meant "force" and came from the Old French "pouvoir" which came from the late Latin "potere=posse, to be able", or that "mettle" meant "spirit" and "modesty" "chastity", which I don't think they do, or that "squandering" meant "haphazard" and was a "nazalised form of the echoic 'squatter', originally to scatter but now confined to scattering money", which it isn't, and . . .'

'By no means, Eugenius,' I agreed; 'I have often heard you squandering the treasures of your mind in talking the most excellent and prodigal nonsense.'

'I'm talking sense now, anyway,' sniffed Eugenius. 'And then they'd be for ever cf.-ing you. If there was a passage in any other play in which the same word was used in the same—or better still, a different—sense, they'd tell you to go and compare it, though what on earth for, except to show that they'd spotted it, I don't know. And they all, every blessed school *Shakespeare* I ever saw, had to have an Introduction telling you what the Introducer thought about the play and

what Schlegel and Boas and Fleay and Pumpherninck and Smelfungus had said about it, when it was written—or when it wasn't—and how comparatively mature or immature it was by rhyme-tests and feminine endings and so forth, and of course there were Appendices A, B, C, D, and E, all about whether Shakespeare had read the Coke's Tale in Chaucer, or Florio's *Montaigne*, and a Glossary to wind up with.'

'I know, I know,' I said, 'I've seen them. Falstaff's "halfpenny worth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack".'

'Don't be smug, Yorick,' grinned Eugenius. 'You mean the other way about—a halfpenny worth of Shakespeare's sack to their intolerable deal of mouldy dough!'

'I beg your pardon, Eugenius,' I said humbly. 'That is probably what I did mean.'

'And not only that,' he went on, 'but they'd tell you in their Introductions—which nobody asked 'em for and nobody wanted—what you ought to think about the play; and not merely what they thought you ought to think (which of course would have put you off like the devil), but they'd tell you what Shakespeare meant you to think, as if—confound it all!—he hadn't been capable of telling you himself or hadn't meant what he said. In fact, they'd often tell you he didn't mean what he said, or that there were other cryptic meanings hidden in his plain words which only they and their fellows (the gifted esoteric sleuth-hounds) had the nose to discover. When they did this they generally quoted some German excavator who had been tunnelling into Shakespeare with a nordic pickaxe and had brought out, sweating, a lump of quartz in three volumes.'

'Fork-bearded professors,' I murmured. 'I thank you, Q., for teaching me that word.'

'I'd like to singe their beards with their appendices,' said Eugenius (with what seemed to me some physiological confusion), 'and then burn them on a pyre of their own books.'

'They wouldn't burn, Eugenius—the books I mean.'

'Oh, I don't know, with lots of petrol . . .' His face relaxed to a smile; he was clearly envisaging the interesting experiment.

'D'you know what sort of stuff they used to tell us,

Yorick?' he began again. 'About what Shakespeare meant, I mean? In *Julius Cæsar*, I remember, we were told that he meant Cassius to be the hero of the play and that Cæsar was represented as a senile old boaster subject to fits.'

'Really?' I asked. 'As bad as that?'

'Absolutely,' said Eugenius. 'Solemn fact. But even when they weren't as bad as that it annoyed me to be told what I ought to make of the characters, how I ought to feel towards them. Why couldn't they let me find out for myself, form my own opinion, have my own likes and dislikes? Why tell me, for instance, that Shakespeare's "partial failure with Orlando as hero only brings out more fully his consummate success with Rosalind as heroine"? Why add that "She is wit and womanliness, as Mr. Verity says, in equal proportions"? If she is I'll find it out for myself with Shakespeare's assistance. I don't want prodding and I don't want opinions shoved down my throat even if they are sound opinions.'

'All the editors and commentators are much too fond (I suppose it's human, but they should suppress their baser passions) of dressing Shakespeare's creations in their own clothes instead of letting you clothe them yourself. Is it really necessary to tell any boy, before you loose him on the text, that Coriolanus was a patrician of overweening pride or that he despised the mob? Could any boy not a congenital idiot read the play without seeing that for himself?

'And so with all the plays, even when their view of the character is Shakespeare's and not their own over-clever interpretation, which it too often is, as in the case of Cassius in *Julius Cæsar* and as in the extraordinary things they have written about Hamlet. For of course they nearly all of them said that Hamlet was mad—really mad—and that Shakespeare meant us to think him so!'

'That is nothing,' I said. 'I mean, nothing new to me. That particular flea has bitten better men than your school-book compilers. Hamlet's simulated madness, while leaving him perfectly sane, has driven more people mad than I care to count. It is a strange and insidious mental germ and does not merely attack German professors (fork-bearded or



clean-shaven), or ancient or middle-aged members of our own Universities, but extends its ravages to the young and innocent.

'I remember that some years ago I saw in the newspapers that a debate had been held at the Union at Oxford upon this question and that the undergraduates had voted, by a considerable majority, that Hamlet was mad, thereby casting grave doubts in the mind of the rest of the world upon their own sanity.'

'It must have been a snap vote,' protested Eugenius. 'They can't have been a representative body even of undergraduates.'

'Why "even"? I confess that I should have been less surprised than I was,' I said, 'if they had been graduates or dons. But let me see, Eugenius, were you not up about that time?'

'Certainly not! I'd gone down long before that, I'm sure. Never heard of it till now. Terrible! It was just about that time, too, that Oxford began steadily to lose the Boat-race!'

'You ought to have stayed up a bit longer,' I said. 'But, after all, the reputation of Oxford is not engendered wholly in the Union—or even upon the Isis.'

'No; but it is awful to think of all those budding commentators,' said Eugenius gloomily. 'Another thing these school *Shakespeares* were frightfully keen about,' he went on, 'was the dates at which the plays were written: their order of succession. As if it mattered a damn.'

'It provides a mildly interesting subject of speculation,' I said, 'and may be a test of literary palate, but is of no serious importance.'

'They didn't think so. They wrote reams about it. And they had all sorts of weird tests by which they professed to decide. They'd take a play and first of all count up how many lines there were in it (oh, they were assiduous enough!), and then they'd see how many rhymed couplets there were and how many lines ran on or stopped—I forget the word . . .'

'*Enjambements*?' I murmured.

'That's it, and then how many had feminine endings and . . .'

'What's a "feminine ending"?' I asked.

'Who is Connie Gilchrist? Don't come the humorous judge, Yorick. You know all right. A line that ends with a mute "e", and then . . .'

'Doesn't sound feminine to me. Matter of fact, I thought a feminine rhyme was a dissyllable, an extra or redundant one. Well, and what then? What did they deduce from these pious labours?'

'I forget exactly,' said Eugenius, 'but I think the idea was that you could sort of feel Shakespeare's metrical pulse that way and note his sense of rhythm developing, and watch him growing up mentally and poetically. Oh, I tell you, they knew all about his inside; they got him taped all right. It was like that picture of Gulliver strapped down and the Lilliputians running all over him with Lilliputian two-inch rules. About the feminine endings, I forget which way it went, but I think that if there were a lot of 'em then it meant it was an early play. I think they said he was much keener on feminine endings when he was young and . . .'

'There might be something in that,' I said gravely, 'if I was persuaded they really were feminine. Yet it is a doubtful test. The interest persists long after youth. Remember Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet. Well, well. And what about the rhymed couplets: Shakespeare's besetting sin?'

'Oh, that was a sign of youth and earliness too. *Enjambements*—lines that run on—were a sign of maturity. At least I think so, but the whole business was such academic blether that I didn't trouble to mug it all up.'

'"Go to the ant, thou sluggard." But I'm afraid they had more assiduous scholars than you, Eugenius. It is the kind of thing that appeals to a certain class of mind. A class grown larger in this mathematical and mechanical age. That sort of thing can be of no conceivable importance, but I suppose it amused them, and I cannot see, my dear Eugenius, that it has hurt you much.'

'It interfered with my reading,' he growled, 'and it wasted my time. About those rhymed couplets, I remember I made separate lists of them out of a lot of the plays and compared them. But what conclusion I was supposed to

come to about the plays' dates I've clean forgotten . . . if I ever knew. Why did you call them Shakespeare's "besetting sin"?"

'Well, aren't they? Shakespeare wrote a great many very bad lines—thousands, I should suppose, but I can't count like your professors—but his worst effusions are to be found in his rhymed couplets. And he never broke himself of the habit. I think it is probably true that there are more of them in the earlier plays than the later, but I don't think there is a single one of the plays which doesn't contain at least one couplet. Even in *The Tempest* Ariel indulges in a couplet. I should not consider *Pericles* to be an early play (though it is one very difficult to place), but it contains quite a lot—I think more than any other play—and some of his very worst. All the characters keep on breaking out into rhymed verse, some of which isn't so bad. It is the terminal couplets that are almost invariably banal or bathetic. *Pericles* himself is the worst offender:

Makes both my body pine and soul to languish,  
And punish that before that he would punish.

That time of both this truth shall ne'er convince,  
Thou showdst a subject's shine, I a true Prince.

Which welcome we'll accept: feast here awhile  
Until our stars that frown lend us a smile.

But it isn't only *Pericles* who lends us a smile. They all do it, lords and ladies, men and women. *Helicanus* has:

Then you love us, we you, and we'll clasp hands;  
When peers thus knit, a Kingdom ever stands.

and *Thaisa*:

My recompense is thanks, that's all;  
Yet my goodwill is great, though the gift small.

'They all drop into rhyme as though they couldn't help it. Yet "the consensus of Shakespearean scholarship"—*Phœbus*, what a phrase!—has decided that *Pericles* was one of his latest plays. Why, then, all these jingles if they be a sign of youth and immaturity?"

'Aha! but they have you, Yorick,' laughed Eugenius. 'You don't pose them so easily as that. For they say—I mean the commentator johnnies: the consensus of what'sname—that Shakespeare didn't write all *Pericles*, that he is only responsible for the last three acts.'

'That won't do, even if it were so,' I replied patiently, 'for the last two I quoted are from Act III, and I could give you a dozen more. *Pericles* himself is impenitent to the last gasp, for he makes his final exit on this—the last line of the play:

Lord Cerimon, we do our longing stay,  
To hear the rest untold: Sir, lead the way.

and then old Gower speaks a rhymed epilogue that Macaulay's schoolboy would scorn to acknowledge as his.'

'Then do you think that Shakespeare wrote the whole of *Pericles*? Or do you mean he wrote none of it? Answer me that, Sir Oracle.'

'All the dogs in the world may bark for me, I like to hear them. As to your question; I will tell you in a minute which I think, but I will say at once it must be one thing or the other. It is either a play of Shakespeare's or it isn't. This device of saying that Shakespeare did not write or is not responsible for this part of one play or that part of another is too easy. No two critics will agree as to which lines to father upon him or to take away. There is no "consensus of Shakespearean scholarship" about *that*. There is no agreement either as to who was his collaborator. There is no evidence whatever (I mean *evidence*) of collaboration at all. All is pure guess-work—and every guess different. But that is not my chief objection to this facile affiliation of Shakespeare's children to half a dozen fathers. My chief objection is that it is patronising criticism, superior, academic, pedagogic, and an insult to Shakespeare. He does not need their help. He does not need them to explain away the fact that he wrote a thousand bad lines. What are a thousand or so to him who gave us so many thousand good ones? His back is broad enough to carry them as his own, and I do not believe that, careless as he was by nature and writing against time,

he ever used any of the actual words of others. He always rewrote.

'Is it necessary to pretend that when you find a pedestrian or slovenly piece of work it can't be his? He does not need such advocacy or such avoidance. I say that he is responsible for what he fathered and that he would not wish to shirk that responsibility. And I believe that whatever he fathered he wrote himself. Homer nodded sometimes. So did Shakespeare. Homer, they tell us, gathered up the oral verse of the Greek cyclic poets and troubadours and made of them the garlands of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. But the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are Homer.

'Shakespeare had read his English history in Holinshed at the Stratford Grammar School, and when he got his first commission from Alleyn, or whoever it was, in London, to write or rewrite or revise or adapt a history play for the stage he certainly worked upon old material to produce the three parts of *Henry VI*. But the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd parts of *Henry VI* are all Shakespeare, as the *Iliad* is Homer. If someone collaborated and wrote all the bad lines and he only the good ones, who in each case was he? There are a dozen guesses and all different.

'One of the most preposterous guesses of all is that Marlowe collaborated with him—or he with Marlowe—in the writing of the 1st part of *Henry VI*. There is not the remotest taste of Marlowe in it, and the bad lines in that play (and there are a good few) are very much more like Shakespeare's bad lines than they are like Marlowe's.

'I say that when you have a play that was produced and acted as *Shakespeare's* (and *Henry VI* clearly was) it is his; and bad or good he must abide our criticism of it as a whole—as it stands.

'I say that whatever he stole—"convey the wise it call"—he rewrote, and until I am shown passages from some earlier play embodied *verbatim* in one of his, I shall continue so to believe. And as to collaboration, I do not see him collaborating with any other playwright. I do not believe he ever did. I know it was an age of collaboration—an easy age of parentage—but Shakespeare, I think, ran alone. He was

careless; he wrote often in a hurry; once he had begun to write it flowed from him, and it has been said of him, and I think it likely, that he never blotted a line; but though he did not take himself anything like as seriously as his commentators do, he took himself seriously enough to know his worth and to know that some of what he wrote would outlast time. He has said so half-a-hundred times himself in the Sonnets and elsewhere. Beaumonts and Fletchers may collaborate, and Dekker and the rest of them, even Ben Jonson and Webster, but not, I think, Shakespeare—nor Marlowe either, for that matter. Shakespeare was an eminently “clubbable man”, as Doctor Johnson was, but I can see neither of them (though for quite different reasons) bearing with a collaborator.

‘I don’t say he wrote consciously, or, in the first place, for glory or for fame; on the contrary, I’m sure he did not; but when he had written of his best he knew it for his best and he knew that it would endure. He did not want collaborators; they would have irked him. Once he had begun—and like all writers (except those who have no business to write at all) he had to *make* himself write—he wrote so fast and so easily that he would have left his collaborator still mending his pen.’

‘You say he did not write for fame in the first place,’ interrupted Eugenius, who had been fidgeting at my discourse. ‘What, then, did he write for? What was his first incentive?’

‘Money, of course. Rose nobles and gold jacobuses. Money to spend at the Mermaid; money to buy fine feathers and grace the company of Wriothsesley; money to lend to his friends; money to go jaunts withal; money to spend (perhaps) on a mistress—for it is idle for us to cast up our eyes and pretend that a young man of twenty-six (and he may have been no more than twenty-two when he first came to London, though I incline to think that he did not come there to stay till about 1590), although already the father of three children, was always faithful to his wife (who was eight-and-a-half years older than himself and had kidnapped him at the age of eighteen), did not sometimes court

a mistress—whether the Dark Lady or another. What was I saying? Oh yes, money. Money was his first incentive, as it has been the first incentive to nearly all poets, as hunger has often been the first incentive to inventions and discoveries and activities of man. How many poets, good poets I mean, have been born rich or even with a comfortable sufficiency? I can only think of Shelley and Byron. Of course, they had to have in them the second urge—the urge of self-expression; and after that the third urge—the desire of communion in this life with their fellow men; and after that the fourth urge—the thirst for fame and for remembrance hereafter.

‘But it is need that first drives. It is need that first overcomes the static inertia of the lazy human will and forces the potential genius—in despite of oh! what leaden and dragging reluctance—to first take a pen into his hand and to get paper and to sit down at his horrid table and to take the lid off his loathed inkpot—and *begin* to write. And I have a profound conviction, a plerophory, that, if there are any mute, inglorious Miltons lost to us, they were not humble dwellers in hamlets, but unfortunate infants born in the purple.’

‘You’ve just split an infinitive,’ said Eugenius.

‘I know I have. And I shall split as many as I like if I think the emphasis requires it. Infinitives are got a good deal above themselves since some journalist discovered recently that grammarians hold them illaminable. I am of Humpty-Dumpty’s mind about words, and I extend my autocracy over grammar. So did Shakespeare, for that matter.’

‘That hardly seems a sufficient . . .’ began Eugenius, but I hurried on.

‘Of course it gets easier after the initial inertia is overcome. But it is (I believe) to all who write (anything worth reading, I mean) a recurrent effort, and Shakespeare had to *make* himself write, like the rest of us, and if he had not needed rose nobles and jacobuses I very much doubt if he ever would have done so. I dare say he would have written the Sonnets and more poems, but I doubt if he would ever have sat down to the grind of rewriting old plays and making

*Henry VI* into a play in three parts for Mr. Alleyn or Mr. Henslowe.'

'So that we owe Macbeth and Hamlet and Lear and Rosalind and Imogen and Cordelia, and all their lovely lines, to the fact that Shakespeare was hard up and wanted to go and drink sack with his friends at the Mermaid? It is not an unpleasing thought,' said Eugenius, and looked at the sideboard.

'Yes—if you like to put it that way—no, not whisky, Eugenius,' I said. 'Brandy. Brandy after port. Yes, I will too. Of course, once he had started, the other urges grew; he found that the words came, he found it easier to begin, he tasted the pleasure of creation, he looked at what he had written and found it good, as the Creator did; but, to the end, it always cost him an effort to begin.'

'You put the desire for fame last, I observe,' said Eugenius.

'I do. It is all very well for Milton to tell us that fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise, and so forth, but I doubt if he would have begun on that tremendous business of *Paradise Lost* if he hadn't wanted money.'

'And he only got £12 for it, they say.'

'That's nothing to do with it. He probably thought he would get more. And I don't think he expected it to run to quite so many lines. Once he had begun, of course, he had to go on.'

'Yes, I can see the young Shakespeare when he wanted some money and was given his first job, by Alleyn or Henslowe or Burbage or whoever it was, to turn the "contention" into a play, I can see him sitting down to it in his lodging in Bishopsgate (with a wet towel round his head, I daresay), with a jumble of books and manuscripts about him, reading and selecting and writing and scratching out, and probably pshawing and tutting and making irritated and contemptuous noises, and then, presently, getting going and writing page after page and throwing them on the floor, and grabbing a fresh sheet, and—and so on. Pass me the brandy. What are you scribbling?' For Eugenius had just himself seized a piece of paper and was pencilling upon it.



'Never mind. Go on for a bit. You haven't answered my question yet about *Pericles*, whether Shakespeare wrote all of it or none.'

'All of it, of course. I thought I'd made that plain enough. It's a troublesome play to place in point of time, but he wrote it, all right.'

'The "consensus" puts it late—after *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Macbeth*. But it is so uneven I can hardly think it. I shouldn't be surprised if Dryden were right after all when he wrote "Shakespeare's own Muse her *Pericles* first bore", and that it was one of Shakespeare's earliest dramatic efforts, but that he kept it in his pocket till 1596 and then brought it out and touched it up. That would account for its queer mixture of good and bad. There is a lot of good in it, and even the bad sounds to me Shakespeare's bad and not anybody else's bad.'

'You seem pretty cock-sure,' said Eugenius, looking up. 'How do *you* fix the dates of the plays, or decide that they are Shakespeare's?'

'By taste, of course. And so do you. Just as you do wine. As everybody ought to do, if they have a palate. To decide on the wine is fairly easy, but to date the vintage is more difficult. Especially as in his case we can't look at the cork!'

'Wines aren't all Château-bottled,' murmured Eugenius, going on scribbling.

'His were. But the trouble is he didn't stamp the cork. So you've got to rely solely on palate. And we aren't all André Simons.'

'But that is the right way to attempt it. It isn't easy. But that is too long to talk about now. I'm only talking now about the certainty of any play being Shakespeare's, or not. And about the absurdity of saying that *Henry VI*, for instance, isn't his because it has a lot of commonplace lines in it. The "consensus" is all at loggerheads about that poor play. Some repudiate Part 1 altogether. Many insist that portions even of Parts 2 and 3 are by other hands. Few admit his authorship of the whole.'

'The Cade scenes in Part 2 could have been written (they most, but by no means all, admit) by nobody else.'

And Part 3 contains passages which, though this was (they say) his first dramatic effort, are nearly as good as anything he ever wrote afterwards.'

'For instance?' asked Eugenius, looking up again from his writing. I went to the bookcase and took out a *Shakespeare* and turned the pages.

This battle fares like to the morning's war,  
When dying clouds contend with growing light,  
What time the shepherd blowing of his nails

("And Dick the shepherd blows his nail" already, you see, Eugenius!)

Can neither call it perfect day, nor night . . .

and then presently:

O God! methinks it were a happy life . . .

and the rest.'

'I remember,' said Eugenius, and snatched the book and went on scribbling.

'There are many more good things in all three parts—in the Talbot scenes in Part 1, all Gloucester's and York's speeches in Part 2, and (to mark the whole as certainly Shakespeare's, even apart from taste) the very significant development of the young Richard, presaging his development into Duke of Gloucester and Richard III, just as the development of Prince Hal into King Henry V is foreshadowed and prepared for in *Henry IV*, and even in *Richard II*. I've never seen that sufficiently noted, by the way. I mean about Richard of Gloucester. It's very interesting.'

'Haven't you?' said Eugenius vaguely.

'You haven't been listening to a word I've been saying,' I complained. 'What's that you've been writing?' and I reached for the paper.

'No, no,' he shouted, jumping up and waving it in the air. 'I'll read it to you myself. It's a scene from a play I'm going to call *The Real Shakespeare—according to Yorick*. Here you are.'

## ACT I

## SCENE I

*The young Shakespeare is discovered sitting in his room in Bishopsgate at a bare oak table littered with books and manuscripts. His doublet is off and lying, as it was thrown, upon a chair. His eyes have dark rings about them and his general appearance shows signs of his hobby for hearing the chimes at midnight. There is a wet towel wrapped about his head obscuring his noble brow. He seizes a manuscript, scans it rapidly, throws it aside. Grabs a clumsy book of print, turns the pages and reads, muttering. Hurls it to the floor. Stares up at the rafters and joists over his head, biting the feather-end of his quill. Pulls a half-written sheet towards him and, plunging his quill into the inkpot, begins to write, slowly at first.*

SHAKESPEARE M'm'm, this Towton battle is the devil. Must bring in my young Richard and let him meet Clifford and make good his boast. Let's see . . . Scene 4 . . . make it a separate little scene. 'Excursions. Enter Richard and Clifford.'

[Writes fast for ten minutes, looking at the ceiling now and then.] There, that'll do. 'Exeunt.' Now for Scene 5. Must bring in poor old King Henry. They didn't give him a fair chance in those old chronicles. It wasn't his fault that he was weak and it is no shame to be scholarly and pious. He would have made a good king in easier times. I like him. I must give him some good lines and make him sympathetic. Let's see.

[Writes, 'Another part of the field. Alarum. Enter King Henry.'] M'm'm . . . soft-hearted: battle-field's no place for him; partly his fault too; there's a tragedy in that. [Writes again, slowly at first.]

'King Henry. This battle fares like to the morning war  
When dying clouds contend with growing light . . .'

[Goes on, writing faster.]

' . . . For what is in this world but grief and woe?'

[Stops and stares up at the ceiling for a long time, chewing his pen. Then—] He should have been a monk or a peasant—not a king. Yes, that's how he'd feel. I can make that get home. I can draw tears out of that!

[Writes again—speaking slowly aloud as he writes.]

'O God! methinks it were a happy life,  
To be no better than a homely swain:  
To sit upon a hill as I do now,  
To carve out dials quaintly, point by point, . . .'

[*Enter Christopher Marlowe. He too shows signs of having heard the chimes at midnight in the Windmill in St. George's Fields.*]

MARLOWE Hello, Will! Writing?

SHAKESPEARE No—turning cart-wheels. Get out! I'm busy.

MARLOWE All right. All right. I won't interrupt. [*Sits on the corner of the table and dangles his legs. Shakespeare goes on writing, but is obviously put out. After a few minutes.*]

How long'll you be?

SHAKESPEARE [*not looking up, and growling*] I dunno. Couple of hours I dare say. I wish you'd shut up and not fidget.

MARLOWE All right. I'll be as quiet as a cat to steal cream. [*After a bit fidgets again.*] Who are you doing it for? What is it?

SHAKESPEARE Old Burbage. Last part of that *Henry VI* play. Promised to finish it to-day. Can't possibly. Look here, Kit, I do wish you'd clear out.

MARLOWE Oh, all right, if it's like that. [*Turns to go.*] I'll wait for you at the Mermaid. [*Claps his pouch.*] Oh! I say, Will, lend us a rose noble.

SHAKESPEARE [*irritably*] What a damn silly thing to ask! Should I be writing like this if I'd got one? That's why I'm doing it against time. I went to old B. this morning and tried to touch him for a bit on account, and he said, 'Nothing doing till you bring me that second act finished—*finished*, my boy'. So there you are. I must bring him as much as I can get done by noon.

MARLOWE All right, Will, I'll wait. Get along with it—and more power to your elbow.

[*Shakespeare bends to his work again and goes on writing, slowly at first and then faster and faster. Every now and then he speaks a line aloud. Stops, mutters to himself. Stares at the ceiling. Writes again.*]

SHAKESPEARE Yes, yes. Civil war. Let the unhappy king *see*. Father and son. Son and father. There's tears here. Oh, poor king!

[*Writes now furiously, throwing sheet after sheet upon the floor.*]

That'll do. By God's wounds that'll do!

MARLOWE What will do? Let me see.

[*Gets off table and picks up papers.*]

SHAKESPEARE No, no! Let them alone. I'll show you presently. Not long now, Kit [*stretching himself*]. I've only got to finish up this Scene 5, and that'll leave only one more scene to finish Act II. I'll do that this afternoon, and we'll take Scenes 4 and 5 to Burbage at noon.

[*Writes again fast, but now easily and in silence.*]

THE REAL SHAKESPEARE

SHAKESPEARE [*throwing down his quill*] There you are. 'Forward, away. (*Exeunt.*)' That's Scene 5. And not bad either. Help me to pick up the sheets.

[*They collect them on hands and knees and Shakespeare puts them in order.*]

Like to hear it now, Kit? There's one good bit, anyway.

MARLOWE Go ahead, Will. But we mustn't miss Burbage. You've got to touch him for an advance, don't forget.

SHAKESPEARE Don't you worry. We'll be in time. I want it as much as you do. Listen to this. [*Declaims Henry's speech, ending*]

'His viands sparkling in a golden cup,  
His body couched in a curious bed,  
When care, mistrust and treason wait on him.'

What do you think of that, Kit?

MARLOWE Not half bad, Will. But you haven't got a line there as good as my 'See where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!'

SHAKESPEARE Of course I haven't. It's not the place for lines like that. But I dare say I shall some day!

MARLOWE I wouldn't put it past you, Will. You write better stuff than most of 'em, young as you are. But come on—or we'll be late.

SHAKESPEARE Young as I am! I like that; why, you're barely a day older than I am. I was born . . .

MARLOWE Yes, I know—you told me . . . and I two months earlier. But I have been in this London years before you. And London ages. Come on.

SHAKESPEARE Half a minute . . . And then, you know, after that speech I make a father come on carrying his dead son whom he has killed, and after that a son carrying his dead father. I've given them some pretty good lines, but the king's speech is the best, I think. Would you like me to read you some more?

MARLOWE [*yawning*] Another time, Will. Another time. At the Mermaid. Oh, yes. Very good idea. Dramatic—what? I'd like to read it. But come on . . . it must be near noon.

SHAKESPEARE [*gathering up papers and putting on his doublet*] Righto. I'm ready. How's your poem like my *Venus and Adonis* getting on—about Leander and Hero? That was a good line of yours in the bit you showed me.

MARLOWE Which one?

SHAKESPEARE 'Who ever loved that loved not at first sight.'

MARLOWE Oh well! That's obvious enough. Got everything? Right—come on! [*Sings*] 'A cup of wine that's brisk and fine!'

SHAKESPEARE [*taking his arm*] 'To drink unto the leman mine!'  
[*They go out together, singing.*]

MARLOWE 'When A-arthur first in Court—'

SHAKESPEARE 'And was a wor-rthy King!'

*[The sound of their singing and the noise of their feet upon the cobble-stones die away in the distance.]*

'And then, of course,' said Eugenius, flushed with authorship, 'the next scene will be at the Mermaid. A tremendous Symposium, and oceans of sack, with Dekker and Peele and Daniel and Drayton and I don't know who else, all talking the most marvellous stuff. Take a bit of doing, though.'

'Yes,' I murmured, 'I should say it would take a bit of doing, Eugenius!'

'What do you think of it, as far as it's gone, Yorick?'

'"Not half bad", if I may quote your Marlowe. A little modern perhaps.'

'Oh, you can turn it into Elizabethan talk if you like. I couldn't be bothered with gramercys and things.'

'Heaven forfend! I should make an unholy mess of it. It is quite good as it stands. And you've got the right idea. That is, I feel quite sure, the sort of way Shakespeare wrote—in his youth certainly and, making due allowance for added years and responsibilities, probably to the end of his writing life.'

'You've struck the right note—humanity. Shakespeare was, above all things, human. Human, human, human. Human *in excelsis*. That is all you need to understand about him. He understood human nature better, more intimately, more widely, more universally than any man who ever lived. He knew its good and he knew its evil. But he put the good first and in all his characters he sought what good was in them and ensued it. "There is some soul of goodness in things evil." There is not one, even of his villains, but has some saving grace. He had eaten—he ate all his life—of the same tree that Eve and Adam tasted; but his head was stronger than theirs and he never, as some even of his contemporaries did and the vast majority of moderns do, over-emphasised the evil, but always sought out the good and used the evil but as a foil, an opposite, to make the good shine whiter. The eternal problem of good and evil did not

flaw his serenity. It only troubles little minds. Poets should be of the mind of Francis Thompson:

If hate were none, would love burn lowlier bright?  
God's Fair were guessed scarce but for opposite sin;  
Yea, and His Mercy, I do think it well,  
Is flashed back from the brazen gates of Hell.

And all great poets are. They—the commentators—need not be afraid for Shakespeare. They need not pack him in cotton-wool nor need they seek to make a superman of him. Supermen are by their very name *inhuman*. Show me a superman—and I will show you a monster. Let Germany grow them!

'Shakespeare, I say, was human *in excelsis*. His humanity was more catholic and comprehensive than the humanity of any other man who has ever lived—but One. If we were meant to be ashamed of our human nature why did God so clothe His Son?'

'Bravo!' said Eugenius, laughing, 'but you'll shock the Puritans if you go on.'

'I should like to,' I said angrily, for I had grown warm; 'I should like to shock all the Praise-God-Bareboneses who ever droned psalms through their unctuous noses.'

'You are getting as angry as I was with the commentators,' said Eugenius. 'I'm so glad.'

'I may not have suffered from them, as you did, in my youth, but in my middle age and my old they have oppressed me exceedingly.'

'Why read them? You needn't.'

'No, I know. But somehow I haven't been able to help it. Whenever I see a book about Shakespeare I've got to get it and read it—or some of it. It's not so much your sort of school annotators who have embittered me but the Solemn Persons who take him solemnly and talk about his "poetic development" and his "metrical progress", and "distinguish", as Professor Dowden does, "four stages of his career": "*In the Workshop*", "*In the World*", "*Out of the Depths*", "*On the Heights*", and date his plays accordingly. Who try to subject him to "a full literary and psychological

analysis". Who spend futile hours counting his lines instead of reading them and fill arid volumes with the results of their barren labours.

'Worse still, when they read into Shakespeare's mind, and into Shakespeare himself, the man and the poet, the moods and thoughts which he has given to his characters, and confound *him* with his myriad and varying creations. When they talk of his "changes of mood" and, if he writes a different sort of play from the last he wrote, perpend portentously that "the tempest of spirit has given way to the tender melancholy of renunciation"; and, if the next (presumed) play is a humorous one, attribute his recovered cheerfulness to the "sunshine of growing popularity". If he writes a sad play like *Measure for Measure* (though it is not so sad neither) they must seek for "the causes of this new perturbation in the soul of Shakespeare" (!)—and so it goes on. *Othello* and *Macbeth* and *Lear* are "evidences of his profound disillusion and discouragement of spirit" and the tide of his pessimistic thought "thenceforward swells and swells till in *Timon of Athens* the dramatist whips himself" (himself, mark you!) "*into an almost incoherent expression of a general loathing and detestation of humanity*".

'That last sentence I have emphasised because it marks, I think, the limit of Shakespearean criticism run mad. So Shakespeare is a misanthrope with *Timon* . . . and (I suppose) a jealous fool with *Othello*; an old man punished by fate for his blindness with *Lear*; a clear brain harnessed to a weak will with *Hamlet*; another and more inevitable victim of fate with *Macbeth*—and so on. No wonder, as this same critic concludes, "Then the stretched cord suddenly snaps". I should rather think it would! Though, oddly enough, according to the same authority, it joins together again and Shakespeare is restored to his right mind and finishes up in the odour of sanctity and of serenity by writing the "final group of plays" . . . the "idyllic romances" of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.

'This happy ending is explained as follows: "*One can only conjecture the occurrence of some spiritual crisis, an illness perhaps, or some process akin to what in the language of religion is*



*called conversion, which left him a new man, with the fever of pessimism behind him, and at peace once more with Heaven and the world."* What sort of criticism is this? The cord of Shakespeare's mind never snapped, nor was it ever near to its stretching-point. *He* the mere creature of changes of mood! *He* writing as tempestuous spirits or the melancholy of renunciation moved him! *He* continually allowing himself to be obsessed by new perturbations of soul! Or giving way to profound disillusion and discouragement of spirit, or letting himself be carried on a tide of pessimistic thought and finally lashing himself into incoherent loathing and detestation of humanity! What a poor picture of a man do these his professed admirers and worshippers present us with! Save me from my friends must be his prayer—if he should care enough.

'If there is one quality which stands out from a consensus of the many tributes to him from his contemporaries above all others, it is, I should have said, his equability, his serenity. And apart from that, it is patent in his writings and from what little we know of his life. He was the sanest man who ever lived, and for that reason the most serene. He might have stood for Daniel's lines (I quote from memory):

He that of such a height hath built his mind  
And reared the dwelling of his thoughts so strong  
That neither Fear nor Hope may shake the frame  
Of his resolvéd powers; nor any wind  
Of Vanity or Malice pierce to wrong  
His settled Peace or to disturb the same—  
What a fair Seat hath he, from whence he may  
The boundless Wastes and Wealds of Man survey!

'He created his characters, was not created by them. No, nor influenced. He moved his men and women up and down the human stage, watching with kindly tolerance the things they did, the things he made them do, the things they *must* do since they were what he made them. The creatures of the poet, the dramatist, must do as he bids them. They have no free will. Man has. Shakespeare had; and he had his well

under control. He would not let even unkindness or ingratitude move him as it moved his creatures:

For guarding sorrow has less power to bite  
The man that mocks at it and sets it light.

He was not easily soured or disillusioned or discouraged. If that first disaster which befell him on the threshold of manhood could not sour him or make him misanthrope or misogynist, nothing could.

'He to be identified with his characters! Their passions and emotions and hopes and fears and all their antics to be mirrors of his own changing and perturbed mind!

'If he be Hamlet and Macbeth and Timon and Lear, then is he also Christopher Sly and Iago and Dogberry and Thersites and all the thousand and one others; and he must have been a stranger beast-man even than Caliban!'

I sat down suddenly (for I had been perorating like a Hyde Park zealot), and filled and lit a pipe.

'Hear, hear!' yawned Eugenius. "'... the Right Honourable Gentleman resumed his seat, having spoken for upwards of three hours". I agreed with most of it, all the same.'

He too filled and lit a pipe.

'I tell you what, Yorick,' he said presently; 'since you too feel like that about Shakespearean commentators let's write a book against them—a sort of *Counterblast to Commentators*. You won't mind collaborating, will you? You're not Shakespeare, you know.'

'No, nor Doctor Johnson. I wish I was.'

'You're not unlike him, sometimes. A bit downright, a bit didactic, aren't you?'

'Oh, the Doctor. Thank you. But look here, let's get this right, Eugenius. When I say something *is* so, I only mean I think it is so. I don't see what else or what more it *can* mean. You don't suppose I think that everybody else must think so. I can't be bothered to keep on saying "at least, that's what I think" every time. You can take that as read.'

'Right you are. What about the *Counterblast*?'

'It's not a bad idea. I'll collaborate all right. Only I'll do the writing. You can supply the ideas, or some of them. Two

people can't do the writing. I've often wondered if they ever do, and how.'

'Very well. How shall we start. What'll be the first chapter?'

'The first chapter is written—or composed—already,' I said. 'It will consist of our talk this evening, including your play. That will be its high spot, Eugenius.'

'You don't mean you'll put down all the stuff you've—I mean we've—been talking into a book?'

'Why not? I certainly shall—as much as I can remember of it, anyway. It will make quite a good start. They'll know what we think about them at once.'

'My hat! You've got a nerve. Good man. Hooray!' He leapt to his feet. 'Let's wind up by saying or singing the Commination Service against Commentators. Strophe and antistrophe. We'll make it up as we go along—like you told me once St. Ambrose and some other Saint Johnny made up the *Te Deum*. I'll begin.'

And he began to intone:

'Let all Shakespearean Commentators be Anathema  
Perish all Atrabillious . . .

'Go on, Yorick.'

'*Acidulous, Analphabetic, Apocryphal, Apodeictic, Acataleptic, Anacreontic* (no, that won't do, they'd never be that), *Angogical, Apolaustic* (no, that won't do either), *Arithmantical* . . . (what does that mean? Arithmancy: "divination by numbers"—your feminine endings exactly, Eugenius). I'm going to B's. (You can't have Bacchanalian) . . . *Balbutient, Boustrophedic* (never mind), *Brachy-cephalic, Bedevilled, Besotted, Bespectacled, Boanergic* (here, no more B's), *Chondronpterygian* (that means "gristly-finned"), *Cimmerian, Circumlocutory, Cleromantic* (that's "divination by lots"), *Cocquecigrugian, Conclamatory, Conglutinated, Coscinomantic* (that's divination by a sieve and a pair of shears), *Cryptogamous, Cynocephalic* (that's dog-headed), *Decomplectic, Dianætic* (no, that won't do, it means "capable of thought") . . .'

'Oh, here, I say, this'll go on for ever, Yorick! I'll jump to W. Only one each. *Wall-eyed*. Go on.'

'Just to leave me X. Not fair, Eugenius. Hold on—*Xyloic.*'

'What's that?'

'Wooden—or as near as no matter.'

'*Yammering, Zætophic* (ouf!) *Commentators*, for ever and for ever. A . . . a . . . men!'

'I'll complete it if you like, Eugenius, and make a sort of Rabelaisian and comprehensive anathematic list—and we'll put it in an Appendix in the Book.'

'I thought you hated appendices as much as I do, Yorick?'

'Yes . . . but this book will have to look exactly like all the others in appearance or they won't buy it. You'll have to prove in one chapter that Shakespeare was a . . . anything you like. And I'll prove in the next that he was . . . anything I like. And we'll write about his boyhood and what he did in those lost eight years . . . and all the usual guessology. But with a *difference*. We shall wear our rue—or our cap and bells—with a *difference*, Eugenius.'

'Very well. Good Lord! See what time it is, Yorick? Past one, and I've got to get home, and I've got some work to do to-morrow if you haven't—and it's Christmas in three days.'

I helped him on with his coat and went with him to the front door. Suddenly he clapped his pockets.

'I say. Lend me a rose noble, Will,' he said. 'Got no money.'

'Here you are, Kit,' I said, handing him a ten-shilling note. 'That enough?'

'Plenty, thanks. I don't have to pass the Mermaid.'

'You wouldn't if you had! Good night. There's a young moon.'

I watched it for a moment, dropping from branch to branch through the trees at the end of the garden. As I came back along the hall I could have sworn I heard a chuckle of laughter from the smoking-room . . . but when I entered it again there was no one there.

Thus was this book born. On the 22nd December, 1939. I don't want there to be any trouble about the dates of *my* works. As Eugenius said, I am not Shakespeare.

## Chapter II

### FACTS

The next time Eugenius and I were gathered together it was New Year's Eve.

There was an oak table drawn near the fire, but with room between it and the flames for us to sit semi-sideways at it and yet regard the fire and ourselves. On the table were glasses and a bottle and a bundle of manuscript—my manuscript.

A silence had fallen. Eugenius seemed half asleep, but he wasn't.

'Tell me, Yorick,' he said in a tone of false interest, 'did you ever read the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*?'

'I knew them nearly by heart once,' I said (with what I have heard described as my usual exaggeration). 'I had a lovely copy . . . at least, it wasn't a copy, because it was the actual *Noctes* torn out of successive *Blackwood's Magazines* by my great-grandfather . . . the port-drinking physician of Bath whom I told you about, Eugenius . . . and bound up together and labelled on the back with Georgian—I mean George-the-fourthian—humour "*Splinters of Ebony*". I was very fond of that volume.'

'I wish you'd look at it now,' said Eugenius.

'I can't,' I said. 'I lost it, with nearly all my library, in the war before this one. I've never had a library—a proper library—since. I hadn't the heart. The burning of the great library of Alexandria was nothing to . . .'

'Never mind Alexandria,' sniffed Eugenius; 'but do you remember the distich in Greek always printed at the head of each symposium?'

'I couldn't quote the Greek,' I said, 'but I think I remem-

ber the English version printed below it. Something like this:

This is a distich by wise old Phocylides  
An Ancient who wrote crabbéd Greek in no silly days,

meaning . . . meaning . . . oh, I forget—something about “not letting the bottle pass round the board like a cripple, but”—by the Lord! I take you at last. Confound you! You might have reached for yourself.’ And I filled my glass and pushed the bottle round clockwise to his hand. He had insisted on Burgundy to see the New Year in, and also as an incentive to literary labour.

Eugenius drank and refilled his glass.

‘Now then,’ he said, ‘what about the Book?’

‘The first chapter is written,’ I said, indicating the crumpled manuscript. ‘It is a faithful record of our last talk and, I think, opens the *Counterblast* very well.’

‘What about Chapter II then? Don’t you think we ought first to set down what is really known about Shakespeare’s life, before we begin embroidering and imagining vain but amusing things?’

‘What is actually known about him could, as the late Lord Balfour would have said, be written on a half-sheet of notepaper. His birth is only inferred from his baptism and his death from his burial. Even the actual date of his marriage to Anne Hathaway is uncertain, though it is certain that she married him. Everything else is inference. There is no direct evidence. It is not known how he grew up. It is not known when he left Stratford, nor how often he may have left it before his definite Hegira shortly after (probably) the twins Hamnet and Judith were born.

‘That event occurred some days before the 2nd February, 1585, on which day they were christened. He is not heard of again till somewhere about 1591 to 1592, when he reappears in London writing plays for Alleyn and/or Henslowe and Burbage. Even this date, 1591 to 1592, is only fixed (if you can call it fixed) by the facts that Robert Greene (who died 3rd September, 1592) makes what is (probably) a reference to a line in the 2nd part of *Henry VI* in his

*Groats-worth of Wit*, and Thomas Nashe in his *Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Divell* seems to allude to the Talbot scenes in the 1st part of *Henry VI*.'

'But, as some Shakespearean commentators say that Shakespeare had no hand in the 1st part of *Henry VI* and precious little in the 2nd, Nashe's and Greene's references go for nothing,' objected Eugenius.

'Yes; but as you and I are quite sure Shakespeare *did* write the 1st part as well as the 2nd and 3rd, we are bound by it to admit that he was in London writing plays before *Pierce Pennilesse* was published in August 1592. Besides which, it is known that the 1st part of *Henry VI* was produced by Alleyn and acted at The Rose on the 3rd March, 1592. That really, if Shakespeare wrote it, is the best and first definite proof that he was, by then, in London, and is better than Greene's allusion.

'After 1592 it is reasonable to suppose that Shakespeare remained, for the most part at any rate, in London until 1611, since between those dates some thirty-seven plays written certainly by him were produced and acted by the Lord Chamberlain's or Her Majesty's Players (of which company he became a member) at divers times and places.

'There is really no certain evidence that he ever acted in any of them, though he may have done, especially at first, but he must have been pretty constantly at hand as author or as author-producer.

'It is known, but only from records of rent or rate demands and not from any letters from or personal statements by him (none of which exist), that he had lodgings during that period—in the years 1597 to 1599—in the parish of St. Helen's Bishopsgate, near "the Theatre" or the "Curtain", and after that on the Surrey Bankside near The Globe Theatre.

'It may be reasonably presumed that he revisited Stratford in 1597 (by which time his plays would have been bringing him money), because that year he bought the freehold house and large garden of New Place in Stratford for sixty pounds.

'In the year 1602 he bought one hundred and twenty-seven acres of land at Stratford for three hundred and twenty pounds.

'Sometime about 1611 he went to live more or less permanently at New Place, visiting London probably from time to time on the production of his plays and to see his many friends. He seems to have remained a partner in or member of the Burbage Company to the end of his life.

'After 1613 he wrote no more.

'He is known to have visited London in 1612, 1613, and 1614.

'His will was signed by him on the 25th March, 1616.

'He was buried at Stratford on the 25th April, 1616.

'There you are. That is really all we know about his life.'

'If that's all,' said Eugenius, 'why not do like the man did who wrote about owls in Iceland? Write simply: "Chapter II. Facts about Shakespeare's Life. There are no known facts about Shakespeare's life."''

'Well, I suppose because there are, you see. Just those few.'

'Well, then, wouldn't it be rather a lark to print a blank page for Chapter II—as Sterne did in *Tristram Shandy*?'

'I'm afraid that wouldn't do either. No; it must go down on a half sheet of paper, as I said.'

'Here you are then,' said Eugenius, and handed me a half sheet, upon which I wrote as follows:

#### KNOWN FACTS OF SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

*Born.* ?

*Baptised.* 26th April, 1564, at the parish church, Stratford-on-Avon.

*Married.* ? Actual date uncertain, but probably within a few days of 27th November, 1582, by special licence from the Bishop of Worcester. *Not* at Stratford church.

26th May, 1583. His daughter Susanna baptised in Stratford church.

2nd February, 1585. His twin son and daughter, Hamnet and Judith, baptised in Stratford church.



1586. Believed to have left Stratford.

1592-3. Discovered in London writing plays.

1593-1611 (or thereabouts). Lived mainly in London, at first in Bishopsgate-without and afterwards on the Surrey side, and wrote *Venus and Adonis*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, 154 sonnets and 37 plays.\*

1611 (or thereabouts). Returned to Stratford and (with fairly frequent visits to London) lived there at New Place for the rest of his life.

*Died.* ?

*Buried.* 25th April, 1616, at Stratford parish church.

\* Some people say he did not write some of them : others say he wrote only parts of some of them : others say he wrote none of them, but that they were written by Francis Bacon or the Earl of Oxford or Queen Elizabeth.

I handed it to Eugenius.

'M'yes,' he said. 'I suppose it must go in like that. But I'm rather disappointed, Yorick; I'd thought we were going to spread ourselves a bit more and write one of those Backward-imagining accounts of the Birth of Genius in which the Spirit of the Future hovers over the new-born Shakespeare and you almost hear the beating of her wings. In fact, I had written a sort of rough draft of it myself for you to touch up. Well, well. It's a disappointing world.' He sighed and emptied the Burgundy.

'It sounds rather good,' I said. 'Let's hear it,' and I fetched another bottle.

Eugenius was obviously pleased. He took several envelopes from out of his pocket and, having got them arranged right side up, proceeded, with some difficulty, to read as follows:

"On the 23rd April in the year 1564 in an upstairs room in a small house at Stratford-on-Avon in the heart of this, our England, a male child was born"—I thought of saying "saw the light", but wasn't sure if they do at once—do they?"

'I don't remember,' I said. 'Go on.'

"... was born. The exact hour is not known to us, but we

*may well conjecture that it was at that mystic time, that pregnant hour before the dawn, when brooding Nature stirs in her sleep and, while yet the eyes of morning are veiled in night, great things are fashioned in the Womb of Time*" (had to get "the womb of time" in somehow).

"*Who, beside the mother and her old tiring-woman*" (or should I say "gossip"?), "*saw that stupendous birth? Did Apollo stand there? And were the Nine Muses grouped about the bed? Surely Melpomene and Polyhymnia were there, and the Muse of Lyric verse, Euterpe . . . For this was the infant Shakespeare!*"

'Go on,' I said; 'you do it as like one of these harlotry players as ever I see.'

Eugenius got another envelope right side up and went on:

"*It was the dawn of the feast day of England's Warrior Saint. He too surely must have assisted, clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful, at that epoch-making birth!*" (I got in "epoch-making" all right).'

'So I observe. Go on.'

"*. . . epoch-making birth.*" I meant to add something about St. George here, but I don't know much about him. Do you, Yorick?'

'Gibbon says there was no such person, or, rather, that if there were he was a dishonest Cappadocian mule-driver of doubtful antecedents, and not a Roman centurion who refused to sacrifice to idols and was martyred.'

'Was he? I mean which?'

'Oh, he was a Roman soldier all right. That is only one of Gibbon's little jibes at Christianity. Apart from the dragon, St. George is true enough—and even with an allegorical dragon. The Crusaders found his cult over there and adopted him and brought him home. He was duly canonised and his Feast is a Double of the First Class in England. Go on.'

'Well, you'll put in something about St. George and then it'll go on . . .' Eugenius selected another envelope and peered at it. 'Oh, yes. "*One would have thought that some great convulsion of Nature would have marked that Birth! Yet lionesses did not whelp, nor ghosts shriek or squeal about*

*the streets, as when Cæsar died; nor was the fount of heaven filled with fiery shapes nor did the frame and huge foundation of the earth shake, as when Glendower was born; nor (as far as we know) did the goats run from the hilly ground about Stratford. Perhaps if one of our modern observatories had been there some such seismic disturbances might have been recorded, but . . .*''

'No, no, Eugenius,' I laughed; 'that is carrying parody too far. No one will swallow that.'

'"Parody"?' said Eugenius. 'Thou dost belie me, Yorick, thou beliest me. It lags behind. You've put me out. Where's that other envelope? Oh, here we are. "*Little did that young mother, that Mary Arden, English mother of him who was to be the Soul of England, the Swan of Avon, the . . . etc., etc., . . . little did she dream as she bent fondly over that hal-  
lowed cradle . . .*"'

'That'll do, Eugenius,' I said firmly. 'I've had enough. Besides, you are getting rambling and maudlin and inaccurate. You, with your Wombs of Time and Pregnant Nature and so on, ought to know (even though you are not a married man) that young mothers do not "bend fondly" over the cradles of their just-born children. They are much too tired to stand up, let alone lean over cradles.'

'Oh!' said Eugenius. 'Well, there's just a bit more . . .'

'No, you don't,' I said. 'I'm sorry, but it won't do. I admit you've got the hang of it, all right, but it is the Historico-biographical and not the Shakespeare-commentatorial-critical. Besides, it is already *démodé*. Twenty years ago perhaps, or even ten. But the Stracheys and the Guedallas and the Feuchtwangers are already washed in Lethe and forgotten. I'm really afraid we can't have it.'

Eugenius crumpled his envelopes and sadly threw them into the fire. I filled him a bumper.

'It's a pity,' he sighed, having drunk. 'There was a bit about John Shakespeare sitting down below and waiting. I know I'm not a married man, but there's a lot of obstetrics in recent novels, and from those I've read I gather they always do. Young fathers, I mean.'

'William was his first child,' I said; 'and so I dare say he was there. What did you make him doing?'

'He was playing cherry-pit—left hand against right. What was cherry-pit, Yorick?'

'I don't know. But surely your school *Shakespeares* told you?'

'If they did I've forgotten. I only put it in because it's clear Shakespeare knew how to play it, and so it was fair inference that his father taught him; and as they didn't play patience in those days—they didn't, did they?'

'I should say not, even on monuments. But you had better look up cherry-pit, and, while you are about it, you might make out a list of all the games you can prove, from the plays, that Shakespeare did play, from marbles to manslaughter. It will make another interesting Appendix.'

'Oh, I've done that already. Partly, I mean. I'll tell you and you can add any more you can think of. Where's that other envelope?'

He rummaged in his pockets and produced it.

'Here you are. Well, of course he knew how to fence and all the language of fencing and sword-play. That's evidenced all over the plays. And he was a toxophilite. He could draw a bow and clap you an arrow in the clout at twelve score, even if he wouldn't on horse-back hit a sparrow flying, and he knew all the terms of archery. That's everywhere, too. I expect old Double taught him. And, of course, he played tennis—real tennis, I mean—for besides the Dauphin's tennis-balls there are a dozen allusions and terms. He must have learned that in London: there wouldn't have been a court in Stratford. Did Herbert or Wriothesley have a private one? Never mind. And he played football: that's *Lear*; and blind-man's-buff or hoodman-blind; and push-pin and more-sacks-to-the-mill; oh, and of course chess, though I don't think he knew very much about it, because Miranda said that Ferdinand was cheating and it isn't easy to cheat at chess, and you'll notice Shakespeare didn't use any chess terms at all; and I think he could use a quarter-staff; and he hunted, but I think on foot. Tell me, Yorick, what sort of hounds were those of Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Basset hounds? Spaniels?'

'Shakespeare was thinking of the Stratford beagles, I expect,' I said. 'I've no doubt he coursed hares, running afoot with them.'

'Very well; then,' continued Eugenius, 'we'll add beagling to the list; and he was a fowler and went out with a gun and shot wild geese and choughs. Where would he have got them, Yorick? And what are choughs?'

'In the Stratford mill pool or among the little reedy islands down by Luddington or Bidford. Choughs are corvine birds. "Rising and cawing at the gun's report", he says, doesn't he? I should have thought he meant simply rooks, but he calls them "russet-pated" and I don't know any red-headed crow. Cornish choughs have red legs . . .'

'Oh well, it doesn't matter. He shot birds with a gun, anyway, and I should think with an Elizabethan gun it wasn't easy. When he shot that deer it would have been with a bow and arrow, of course. You wouldn't go poaching with that sort of a gun, I don't think.'

'I don't believe he did shoot that deer,' I said; 'but go on with your list.'

'I've only got one left. I think that as a boy he must have played a sort of primitive water polo in the Avon with his schoolfellows . . .'

'I've followed all the others,' I interrupted, 'but where do you get that?'

'*Henry VIII*,' said Eugenius shortly; 'and then . . .'

'Oh, the little wanton boys that swim on bladders? Isn't that a little far-fetched?'

'Not a bit. They infer things on much less evidence than that. Well, that's about all I could think of on the spur of the moment; but I'll look up some more for your Appendix before we've finished the Book. By the way, do you think he played cards? I can't remember any allusions.'

'I can't think of any very definite one. But, of course, he might very well have done so. He doesn't make the poor mad French king, for whom they used to say cards were invented or, anyway, brought to Europe, say anything about them in *Henry V*. There is one allusion that seems to point

to cards; it is in *Henry VIII* too (like your water polo, but clearer than that). In Act V, Sc. 1, this occurs:

KING HENRY Charles, I will play no more to-night;  
My mind's not on't; you are too hard for me.

SUFFOLK Sir, I did never win of you before.

KING HENRY But little, Charles;  
Nor shall not, when my fancy's on my play.

'That sounds like cards, doesn't it?'

'M'm, might be dicing,' said Eugenius. 'Henry VIII would have been a dangerous man to dice with, though. Or to play cards with either, for that matter. If it was cards, what game do you suppose they played? Picquet? When did cards come to England? And what games would the Elizabethans have played?'

'I don't know. I don't think anybody does, exactly. I like to think they were brought to England by that great filibuster Sir John Hawkwood in between his spells of freelancing in Italy. I think our cards came from Italy rather than from France, because the names of the suits, "Clubs" and "Spades", are from the Italian *bastoni* and *spada* and not from the French *trefle* and *pique*. As to what card games were played in England before the eighteenth century, I have no idea. *The Rape of the Lock* is my first literary introduction, and the game there was ombre. But, look here, aren't we straying rather far from our subject? This chapter was to have been a chapter of facts, and you are making it a chapter of imaginations.'

'Ah, but all based on sound Shakespeare texts,' retorted Eugenius; 'and so long as we go on talking about Shakespeare you will find, Yorick, that the real Shakespeare will gradually emerge from our chatter, however apparently discursive—which is, I take it, what this book is driving at. And, besides, your half-sheet of note-paper, the real Chapter II, has cleared the ground and has left us a splendid lot of blank and barren years to fill.'

'There's all the time between his baptism and his marriage—eighteen and a half years—and then all the time between when he left Stratford after the twins were born, say 1585, to when he is found writing plays in London in 1592 to 1593,

another seven or eight years. We've got all that to play with and to imagine things in, and . . .'

'You go too fast with your imaginings, Eugenius,' I interrupted. 'We must in some sort at least be serious, and we—or I—have yet to gather up the threads of our first chapter and to turn its somewhat loose rhetoric into a considered and destructive criticism, backed by quotations from their own works, of some of the more egregious of Shakespeare's commentators, and thus (Shakespeare, I hope, aiding us) to lift the heavy incubus of accumulated neo-scholarship which, like the ice about the South Pole, has been piling up and thickening till it threatens to obscure and strangle him altogether. It will entail, I'm afraid, two or three heavy and dullish chapters; but it has got to be done if this *Counterblast* is to fulfil its mission. As to your imaginings, they shall come hereafter; there will be a time for such a deed.'

'Need you start on that yet?' pleaded Eugenius. 'I wanted the next chapter to be about Shakespeare's boyhood. I've got a lot of ideas about it; from the time he was able to walk until he ran away to sea when he was about twelve; and then . . .'

'I foresee I am going to have trouble with you, Eugenius,' I broke in. 'I can't let you make a dime novel of the Book. What's all this about Shakespeare running away to sea? What . . .'

'Never mind,' said Eugenius sulkily. 'You get on with your serious stuff and leave me alone. You can have the next chapter; it will give me more time to work out my very reasonable and "internally evidenced" (they are always appealing to "internal evidence", so why shouldn't I? and a great deal more logically, too, I bet) ideas about what happened to Shakespeare during those two long periods of blank and empty years. You can have the next chapter, but Chapter IV is mine. And I expect they'll need a breath of fresh air after your considered and solemn stuff.'

'Very well. I dare say they will,' I agreed meekly, and looked across at the clock. 'Nearly midnight. Buzz the bottle, Eugenius, and let us see what the night is like and say good-bye to the old year and welcome the new.'

Eugenius did as he was bid (like the obedient Yamen in the *Rejected Addresses*) and as he set his glass down, quoted, "'Time is like a fashionable host That slightly shakes his parting guest by the hand, And with his arms out-stretched as he would fly Grasps in the comer'". Extraordinary how everything that Shakespeare says is always so beastly true. What snobs we are! Why do we kick the old year out? Why do we welcome the new?"

'You needn't,' I said. 'I am always for the old year. I agree with Garrick, "Let others hail the rising sun, I bow to that whose course is run". Anyway, we had some good hours in 1939. How many are we likely to have in 1940?'

'Lots,' said Eugenius. 'Don't be gloomy. Let us have another bottle and drink to those who went down with the "Rawal Pindi" and to those who so soon avenged their deaths by destroying the "Graf Spee" and . . .'

'Yes, and to England and liberty!'

So we drank, and then went out into the porch and looked into the night. It was bitter cold, pitch dark, and sparsely snowing. The year 1940 had a chilly birth and no star danced at its nativity. We did not stay long, but went back to the log fire.

'I give you another toast,' I said as I filled our glasses. 'To the memory of Captain Kennedy of the "Rawal Pindi." He lived in these parts. He was a good man. Simple. A very good man. Shakespeare would have loved him. . . .'

We were silent for a little.

'We ought to sing something,' said Eugenius. 'What shall we sing?'

"'Fear no more the heat of the sun'," I said. 'Shakespeare's greatest lyric song. And appropriate. It is the epitaph of all good men.' And so we sang the New Year in (or rather Eugenius did, for I cannot sing):

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages;  
Thou thy worldly task hast done,  
Home art gone and ta'en thy wages;  
Golden lads and girls all must,  
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.



THE REAL SHAKESPEARE

Fear no more the frown o' the great;  
Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;  
Care no more to clothe and eat;  
To thee the reed is as the oak;  
The sceptre, learning, physic, must  
All follow this, and come to dust.

Fear no more the lightning-flash,  
Nor the all-dreaded thunder-stone;  
Fear not slander, censure rash;  
Thou hast finished joy and moan:  
All lovers young, all lovers must  
Consign to thee and come to dust.

'I thought you said you couldn't sing,' said Eugenius when he had finished.

'No more I can,' I said. 'I wasn't singing.'

'I'll swear someone was singing besides me.'

'So I thought too.'

'Must be an echo.'

'Hardly, in this low-ceilinged room.'

'Queer thing.'

'Very queer,' I said. 'Anyway, we have, or you have, sung the Old Year out, and we had better begin the New Year well by going to bed.'

## Chapter III

### THE INCEPTION OF THE MODERN SHAKESPEARE-MYTH

Eugenius placed upon a convenient table a detective novel and a large pouch of tobacco, and having drawn his chair up to the fire and pulled out a pipe, announced that he was ready to listen.

‘I suppose you’ve got your heavy guns all ready,’ he said. ‘Get on with the barrage.’

‘In his lifetime,’ I began in my best tutorial manner, ‘Shakespeare was accepted alike by his fellow poets and by the general public simply for what he was. The public liked his plays and flocked to see them; his fellow poets recognised him as a fellow poet and playwright; some of them, at times, a little uneasily and with a natural touch of jealousy, as a better or at any rate a more popular and successful playwright than themselves.

‘But in the praises that his contemporaries bestowed upon him, both in his lifetime and after his death (and they were not few), the note that is struck, and that has come down to us like the sound of bells that have just ceased ringing, is a note of affection, warming the praise and, in a way, overshadowing it. His praises were not then couched in terms of superlatives of genius, they were not flattery to a master nor incense to a king, but tributes to an admired friend.

‘It was as if his qualities of humanity, of urbaneness, of kindness—almost of simplicity—had served to veil somewhat and temper the heat and splendour of his sun. “As if”—do I say? But what I mean is that that is exactly what they did, and what to this day I think they do, to all those of us who still see him close (as they did) by reading him aright.

'These tributes to him by those who knew him in the flesh should be to us the surest golden key to unlock his heart, a diving-bell when we plunge for pearls, and a sheet-anchor of sanity. They are all of the same kind, whether from humble friends or great poets; all come from the same well of affection. I could not, if I wished to, quote them all. They make a book in themselves, and there you may find them, in the *Shakespeare Allusion-Book* or in one of the Appendices to Sir Edmund Chambers's monumental *William Shakespeare*.

'It is enough to say here that to the anonymous authors of the *Return from Parnassus* (1600) he is always "sweet Mr. Shakespeare".

'To John Davies (a fellow poet), writing in 1603, he is "generous in mind and mood".

'John Weever (1599), another fellow poet, calls him "honey-tongued"; and his Company-fellows Heminge and Condell, in editing the First Folio, speak of him as their "so worthy friend and fellow".

'The only eulogy in which praise of his genius outweighs affection for his person is that of Francis Meres in his *Palladis Tamia* or Wits Treasury (published in 1598), in which he compares Shakespeare to Plautus and Seneca as being in English the greatest both in comedy and tragedy as they, severally, were in Latin. And it is to be observed that Francis Meres (so far as we know) did not know Shakespeare *personally*. Yet, even so, the reputation of kindliness and sweetness of temper must have reached him, for he writes: "As the soule of Euphorbus was thought to live in Pythagoras so the sweete wittie soule of Ouid lives in the mellifluous and hony-tongued Shakespeare,—witness his Venus and Adonis, his Lucrece and his sugred sonnets among his private friends." '

'Too much honey and sugar,' said Eugenius. 'I don't call them sugared.'

'Nor I, but it shows that something of the hive seems to cling about Shakespeare and had been wafted to Meres and sweetened his epithets. It seems to have been impossible to quarrel with Shakespeare. The only angry thing on record

is Greene's outburst of the "upstart crow", and even for this Chettle, the editor of Greene's *Groatsworth*, apologised soon afterwards, saying that he was sorry to have given offence to one "in demeanour no less civil than excellent in the qualities he professes" and testifying to "his uprightness of dealing . . . and his facetious grace of writing".

'Even Ben Jonson, as irascible and knock-you-down a man as ever lived, tried to quarrel with him and couldn't.

'Shakespeare gave him no chance. And (which is even more extraordinary) Shakespeare managed somehow not to quarrel with Dekker and his other friends and champions either, and kept clear of the *Poeto-machia* which raged. More extraordinary still, Jonson not only forgave him for various kindnesses (it has been said that Shakespeare assisted in getting him out of prison on one occasion) and for his magnanimity in refusing to quarrel—both very difficult things to forgive—but came, as is quite clear, actually to love him.

'He praised his poetry indeed, in the verse he wrote for Heminge and Condell for the First Folio, in terms which would almost have seemed extravagant if they were not so obviously sincere, and it is to be observed that these lines are addressed "To the memory of my beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare".

'But he praised the man even more. He says of him that he was "honest and of an open and free nature". He calls him, as did all his friends, "*gentle*", and even bursts out: "I loved the man and do honour him, on this side Idolatry, as much as any." Which, coming from Ben, is (as Eugene Wrayburn would say) more than equivalent to a paternal blessing accompanied by a gush of tears.

'Well, there you have Shakespeare as his contemporaries saw him, and however little a man's contemporaries are likely to be the best judges of his poetry, they are certainly the best judges of himself—there you have him, the gentle Shakespeare; a man with whom you could not quarrel, a man not easy to disturb, a man you sought in time of trouble, a sane, equable, generous-minded man.

'It has been reserved to the profound critics of the twentieth century to discover that when psychologically

analysed (whatever that process may be) this man was continuously swayed by conflicting passions, as alternately lifted in a "tempest of spirit" to heights of exaltation or plunged into depths of "profound disillusion and discouragement"; at one moment cheerful in "the sunshine of popularity and success" and at the next "occupied with profound or vexatious searchings of spirit"; alternately "idealising womankind in Portia, Beatrice, Rosalind and Viola" and "dragging their honour in the dust; now seeing in human nature all its nobility or its touching weaknesses and then lashing himself into a general loathing and detestation of humanity". A man, in fact, not the master but the slave of his art, and his plays therefore rather the utterances of the Oracle of Delphi through the frothing lips of a possessed initiate than the considered music of the favourite son of Apollo. What do you think of that, Eugenius?

'Fudge!'

'Thank you, Mr. Burchell. I am encouraged to continue. When all those who had known Shakespeare in the flesh were dead, there ensued that period of neglect which is the lot of all poets, dramatists, novelists and, I think, sculptors, painters, and all manner of artists. It is a commonplace of critical observation that though a poet may have been a prophet in his own generation, he is never one to the generation that succeeds him. It is natural and inevitable.

'We may love our fathers, but we do not commonly think them geniuses, and it is a peculiarity of human nature that the taste of any generation is always in more violent conflict with that of the generation *immediately* preceding it than with any other. Sometimes it takes two generations or even more before the submerged merits are rediscovered. Thackeray and Meredith and Stevenson have not yet emerged from their temporary bath in Lethe, though they presently will.

'In Shakespeare's case the period was rather prolonged for various reasons, but chiefly because the dominant Puritanism of the age immediately following was not good for stage-plays and because, when that snake was scotched at the Restoration, English poetry and drama were already

swinging back to the classical (or pseudo- or French-classical) model and the verse cadences that Shakespeare had broken and made irregular were being Corneilled and Racined back into rhyming pentameter couplets. The age of the heroic metre had already set in, and it dominated English poetry till the Romantic revival of the beginning of the nineteenth century. Considering how utterly different the excellencies of Shakespeare are from the excellencies of the eighteenth century, I think it reflects great credit upon the poets and critics of the period from 1666 to 1789 that they retained so catholic a sense of beauty as to have appreciated Shakespeare at all; and to Dryden, who was the first of them to re-awaken interest in him and to pay him reasoned homage, belongs, I think, a considerable measure of admiration. When you consider how utterly different was the genius of Dryden from that of Shakespeare, how completely unlike their views of poetry, their sense of the rhythm of verse and their technique, it is rather wonderful to find Dryden saying that:

Shakespeare was the man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul . . . when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned: he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature: he looked inwards, and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid; his comic wit degenerating into elenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him; no man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself high above the rest of poets.'

'Hear! Hear!' said Eugenius. 'I couldn't have put it better myself! "He is always great when some great occasion is presented to him." He would make you a speech before going into battle—but not before killing a calf. And "the spectacles of books" is good. Too many people (especially Shakespearean commentators) never see nature except through those glasses.'

'Quite so; but Dryden, you see, was a poet, and deep calls to deep though one of them be shallower. In Dryden, too, there still lingered the last embers of the Elizabethan fire, and it was easier for him than it was, later, for Pope to feel Shakespeare's true greatness.

'The first editor of Shakespeare was Nicholas Rowe, and his edition (in seven volumes) was not published till 1709—nearly a hundred years after Shakespeare's death. It is a very good edition and is prefaced by a very good short Life, and I do not think it would very much have mattered (to real lovers of Shakespeare, I mean) if there had been no other Life or edition since. Rowe was not out to be clever or ingenious, but produced, for the first time, a reasonably sound text which, for all the cleverness and ingenuity displayed by subsequent editors, is not yet so very much improved. As to his Life, much has been added in words but little in matter: and his critical remarks are almost invariably sound and never over-ingenious or spectacular. One pregnant remark he makes has always stuck in my mind—perhaps because I so nearly agree with it. In discussing the sequence of the plays he says:

perhaps we are not to look for his beginnings, like those of other writers, in his least perfect works; art had so little and nature so large a share in what he did, that for aught I know, the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, were the best.

'Add that to Dryden's saying that he always rose to great occasions and you come to the question of the order in which the plays were written with a saner mind than most of the moderns do.

'At any rate, if I were setting a boy on the path to Shakespeare I should give him a copy of Rowe's edition to begin with and tell him that when he had read all the plays twice or three times, he should take up Dr. Johnson's edition, ignoring Pope, Theobald, Warburton, and Hanmer (especially the egregious Warburton), and compare it with Rowe's in the light of Johnson's notes upon the notes of his predecessors. He should also carefully study Johnson's Intro-

duction and be impressed to observe how that sound critic rose above the prejudices of his age. After that he can jump straight to Hazlitt and Lamb and Coleridge. I have what is perhaps an uncritical affection for Rowe because the first *Shakespeare* I ever bought with my own money was a copy of his edition bound up in one fat volume. I bought it in Holywell Street for six shillings.'

'I never knew Holywell Street,' said Eugenius. 'I wish I had. It must have been a fine alley-way to potter in.'

'You've missed a great deal. It was a street of far more adventure than Fleet Street.'

'Why do you pass over Pope and Theobald and Warburton and Hanmer?' asked Eugenius. 'I always understood that Pope wasn't so bad, and Theobald at any rate made the immortal emendation about "babbling o' green fields".'

'So he did, and made himself immortal by it. No man ever attained immortality so easily. He was the first of the wrens which the eagle Shakespeare has carried on his wings. As to Pope, it is true that he spoke of Shakespeare with high eulogy, as high, indeed, as Dryden's. Here are some of the things he said:

If ever any author deserved the name of an original it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; . . . The poetry of Shakespeare was inspiration indeed: he is not so much an imitator, as an instrument of nature; and it is not so just to say that *he* spoke from *her* as that *she* speaks through *him*. His *characters* are so much nature herself that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shows that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image. . . . But every single character of Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in life itself: it is as impossible to find any two alike: and such as, from their relation or affinity in any respect, appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found to be remarkably distinct.

'Now that is fine praise, Eugenius, and the latter part of it right and discriminating; yet it does not ring, to me, as



true as Dryden's or as understanding. And I cannot, after reading all that Pope has said and his notes, rid myself of the feeling that he did not understand or really care for Shakespeare as much as Dryden before him or Dr. Johnson after him. It was impossible, as I say, for the eighteenth century to understand the seventeenth, and to minds like Addison's and Pope's, I suppose, most impossible of all. When *Cato* was the standard of dramatic perfection who could stomach *Lear*?

'As to Warburton, he was the most perfectly assiduous and self-satisfied ass of all the Shakespeare-parasites who have sought fame by annotation. Theobald's "babbling" achievement has been responsible for much; and, after him, Malone and everybody, except Johnson, tried to be as clever. Johnson had more sense. Though possessed of quite as much scholarship as they and a very much better balanced critical mind, he was content for the most part to print the notes and emendations of his predecessors with comments of his own upon them. He did not go out to be clever on his own account. Every Shakespeare student, however, should, as I have said, read his Introduction and his notes. In the Introduction he will find much shrewd criticism about Shakespeare's alleged obscurity, about the danger of emendations, about what seemed to the eyes of the eighteenth century his excellencies and virtues and what seemed his faults. He will find Johnson saying that "Shakespeare, whether life or nature be his subject, always shows plainly that he has seen with his own eyes"; that "In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species"; and he will be surprised to notice that with regard to those sacrosanct "unities of time and place" so flouted by Shakespeare and so revered (in words) by the eighteenth-century mind, he, the arbiter of eighteenth-century English, dares to constitute himself Shakespeare's champion and most conclusively vindicates and even approves his horrid solecisms.

'I have particularly quoted those two of Johnson's sentences above because I consider Hazlitt's attack upon

him (in his Preface to his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*) which has since been much followed by others, to have been uncritical and unfair. For instance, Hazlitt says:

Thus he (Johnson) says of Shakespeare's characters, in contradiction to what Pope has observed and to what everyone else feels, that each character is a species, instead of being an individual. He in fact found the general species or *didactic* form in Shakespeare's characters, which was all he sought or cared for . . . etc., etc.

'As I read Johnson's sentence Hazlitt wholly misunderstands him. What Johnson meant was, and I think his words express it clearly enough, *not* that the individual ceased to be an individual, but that his individuality is so marked, that Shakespeare had endued him with so transcendent an individual individuality of that particular kind as to render him for ever thereafter the typical and accepted fine-flower of the species to which he belongs. Hereafter the species is, as it were, whelmed in that supreme specimen and prototype. Other writers may portray braggarts, and you think of Pistol and Parolles. Mention a boon companion, and you think of Falstaff or Sir Toby Belch; a crafty villain, and you think of Iago or Edmund; a lover, and you think of Romeo. I need not continue the list, but since much of Hazlitt's attack is based on this mis-reading it loses, I think, a little of its value and effect.

'To return to Johnson's Introduction, the student will learn much of Shakespeare from this Introduction and from the notes; and if, in so doing, he learns also a good deal about Johnson, why, that will be all to the good.

'He says of the notes: "*As I practised conjecture more, I learned to trust it less; and after I had printed a few plays, resolved to insert none of my own readings in the text. Upon this caution I now congratulate myself, for every day increases my doubt of emendations.*"

'Would to God, Eugenius, all "practisers of conjecture" had been as sensible or as humble-minded.

'The notes are particularly interesting, as they illustrate both Johnson's critical acumen and his prejudices; but

most of all, I think, in showing up, as they do whenever he quotes them, the inanity or pretentiousness of Warburton's emendations. In his text he restored most of the old readings and rejected the "conjectures" of Pope and Warburton, and on the few occasions when he admitted and praised them, as in Warburton's "a god kissing carrion" for "a good kissing carrion", almost as famous as Theobald's "babbling", I think he was wrong. In all my own copies of Shakespeare I have restored "good", because it makes perfectly good sense, is Elizabethan in phrase, and sorts well with Hamlet's mood of bitterness, and because I agree absolutely with Dr. Johnson's ruling when he says: "*It had been my settled principle that the reading of the ancient books is probably true and therefore is not to be disturbed for the sake of elegance, perspicuity, or mere improvement of the sense.*" The eighteenth century had a very different idea of "elegances" from that of the seventeenth, and if each succeeding generation is to be permitted to emend Shakespeare to suit its own manners there will presently be little of the real or original Shakespeare left. Listen again, Eugenius, to the sensible Doctor: "*I have always suspected that the reading is right which requires many words to prove it wrong; and the emendation wrong, that cannot without so much labour appear to be right.*"

'A Samuel come to judgement,' said Eugenius, knocking his pipe out on the stone hearth.

'And here is his conclusion of the subject: "*Notes are often necessary, but they are necessary evils. Let him that is yet unacquainted with Shakespeare and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing, let it not stoop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged let it disdain alike to turn aside to the name of Theobald and of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest of the fable. And when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness and read the commentators.*"

'By Heaven! Eugenius, that conclusion should be printed in letters of fire on the title-page of every *Shakespeare* published!'

'Except the last sentence, Yorick,' said Eugenius drily, 'for that assumes that he would achieve exactness by reading them. Whereas he would only find himself with his legs clogged in treacle and his head plunged in Malebolge. But, tell me, why are you thus traversing the ages and labouring through editions and impedimenta?'

'Because, Eugenius, I am diagnosing a disease; and in the diagnosis of any disease it is necessary to go back to its first beginnings and to trace the malevolent microbe to its source. I want to show that at first and for a long time the appreciation of Shakespeare was simple, sensuous, and natural; that Shakespeare was regarded, at first, as a genius if you like, but as a very human person all the same, who wrote plays to make money for himself and to give pleasure to others; but that gradually the vanity of lesser men, seeking to obtain money or reputation through him, has, instead of illuminating, obscured him and, instead of emphasising his humanity, de-humanised him and, while pretending to deify him, made him a Mumbo-Jumbo monster.

'Up to the end of the eighteenth century not much harm had been done. The Theobalds and the Warburtons and the Malones had been content with verbal emendations of the text, a text admittedly corrupt in the Quartos and the Folios; they had not yet begun, *except for the purpose of justifying their emendations*, to tell us what Shakespeare really meant, but only what (they believed) he really said. Yet I think you will have seen that the germ had been planted and the disease had begun to take hold. The conjecturers had to support their conjectures of verbal emendation by professing to enter into the mind of Shakespeare and assuring you that this was what he must have meant and that therefore it must be what he said. It was reserved for later commentators to extend this usurpation of Shakespeare's mind and to possess it altogether, and with such a complete and demoniac possession as finally to leave him no longer speaking out of his own lips but out of theirs.'

'But they don't all say the same thing,' objected Eugenius.

'By no means,' I agreed; 'but a man may be possessed by more devils than one, and, in my recollections of demoniac possession, scriptural or other, generally is. At any rate, you have now seen the beginning, and from Theobald to Professor Dover Wilson you may trace the progress of the disease. I will do it here as shortly as I can, and you will be afforded a little temporary relief because in the next period, that of the English Romantic revival, Shakespeare came for a time to be read more naturally again, to be loved for himself and for the beauty he shows and the pleasure he gives. That is why I said that after Johnson, the student should leap straight to Hazlitt and to Lamb. Every Shakespeare student should read Hazlitt; and the best time to read him is immediately after reading Johnson, to whom he supplies the necessary corrective. Each had the literary prejudices of his period, but I incline to think that Hazlitt was even less capable of fairly appreciating Johnson than Johnson was of fairly appreciating Shakespeare. Both were downright and dogmatic, but Johnson's downrightness was restrained by a more logical habit of mind than was Hazlitt's. The modern reader will find himself continually disagreeing with both of them, but if he bears in mind the ages at which they severally wrote he will admit Johnson to have been by far the better and even more catholic critic.

'The point which I wish to make about the critics of this Romantic revival period, however, is: that they were still simple. They were still plain literary critics and not (with one exception) metaphysicians. They still believed that the chief function of literary critics is to act as signposts to beauty and, having led their readers by the hand through the pleached walks of Shakespeare's garden and the primrose-studded drives of Arden woods, they left them there to pick flowers and admire the view.'

'Nowadays,' said Eugenius, 'they lead us as Mr. Barlow did Harry and Tommy, and discourse didactically upon the common objects of the seashore. Worse than that; for these super-Barlows read all sorts of cryptic and metaphysical meanings into the shell of the plainest periwinkle.'

'Hazlitt didn't do that,' I agreed. 'For all that he published (as I think his first book) a study of *The Principles of Human Action*, you would never, from his literary criticisms, take Hazlitt to have been a metaphysician.'

'I should have called him the Cobbett of criticism,' said Eugenius. 'Quite sound, but as full of prejudices as an egg of meat. . . . Lamb was far the better critic.'

'Lamb was about the best critic we have ever had,' I agreed, 'because he was the simplest, had no axe to grind, and loved beauty for its own sake. You will not find Lamb wasting his time and yours by counting lines and weighing syllables. Nor Hazlitt either, for that matter. But Hazlitt's criticisms are, after all, a little slapdash, a little casual and superficial, journalistic. But then he wrote as a journalist or as a *dramatic* critic. He had neither the sensitive ear of Lamb nor anything approaching Lamb's sense of beauty.'

'You will continually disagree with him, as I say, and, when he selects passages for quotation, as much for what he omits to notice as for what he chooses. For instance, he selects for quotation out of *Richard II* Gaunt's dying speech, of course, and then the description of Bolingbroke's triumphal entry into London with the deposed Richard in his train; but says nothing about Richard's soliloquy upon the deaths of kings, which is almost the most perfect thing Shakespeare ever wrote and (*me judice*) a good deal better than Hamlet's somewhat weak and inconclusive ponderings.'

'Again, though now he is simply following Schlegel, he selects Iago and Richard III as Shakespeare's choicest villains, and leaves out Edmund—a far worse villain than Richard, even in the false-popular black that Shakespeare was compelled to paint him.'

'I forgive Hazlitt much, however, because of his liking for *Cymbeline*, that lovely but neglected play, and because, too, at the end of his not very illuminating remarks about *King Lear* he has the sense to recognise Lamb as a better critic than Johnson or Schlegel (if not than himself), and to quote him thus when he exclaims against that strange

taste that devised for the Play "love scenes and a happy ending":

A happy ending!—as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through,—the flaying of his feelings alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after, if he could sustain this world's burden after, why all this pudder and preparation—why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station—as if at his years and with his experience, anything was left but to die.

'Yet, having quoted this piece of luminous and unerring insight, Hazlitt is foolish enough to add some rather inept final remarks of his own.'

'I remember them,' interrupted Eugenius. 'Pretty bad they are, too. But I can remember some worse still. What about his views on Shakespeare's "Poems and Sonnets"? Eh, Yorick? He does not apparently include the songs and lyrics as "poems", but is dealing only with *Venus*, *Lucrece*, and the Sonnets; but to say of these "*In expressing the thoughts of others, he seemed inspired; in expressing his own, he was a mechanic*" is a far worse and more flat-footed piece of criticism than any of Johnson's eighteenth-century-minded pronouncements which he holds up to scorn. I fail to see why Shakespeare was any more expressing his own feelings in *Venus* or *Lucrece* than he was in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. In the Sonnets no doubt he was. But if they are the work of a mechanic I shall have to recant my hatred of machinery.

'And after asking whether there is "*the slightest comparison between Shakespeare and either Chaucer or Spenser as mere poets*"—(*mere poets!* by Phœbus!) and answering "Not any", he adds: "The two poems of *Venus and Adonis* and of *Tarquin and Lucrece* appear to us *like a couple of ice-houses*. They are about as hard, as glittering and as cold."—(*Ice-houses!* by Aphrodite!) He was quite honest, though, about the Sonnets, for he begins the ten lines he bestows upon them by saying, "*Of the Sonnets we do not well know*

*what to say*". He certainly didn't! I am afraid he was only a dramatic critic, and that poetry was beyond him.' And Eugenius sat back again in his chair.

'Well, well,' I said. 'Hazlitt had his limitations. Let us leave him and take on heavier metal: Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

'Coleridge was a better critic, certainly a less superficial one, than Hazlitt; but if Hazlitt was too superficial, Coleridge was too profound. And the worst of profundity is that, whether in water or in criticism, it gets you out of your depth. Coleridge's head comes up occasionally, and when it does he emits sentences of extraordinary insight; but too often he is completely under water and you divine his whereabouts only by bubbles.

'He had—if I may so put it without hurting anybody's feelings—the teutonic mind: that passion for words which results in making words meaningless, that ardour for comprehensiveness which obscures comprehension, that itch for definition which is a snare to the feet of the critic. He could not very well have read and studied Schlegel on Shakespeare before he delivered his own first lectures on Shakespeare in 1807–8, for Schlegel did not deliver his Lectures on Dramatic Literature in Vienna till 1808; but he was in Germany attending lectures in Ratzeburg and Göttingen from 1798 to 1799 and became very considerably teutonised. In 1818, when he was delivering his better-known course of lectures on Shakespeare, he vehemently denies in a letter that he owed anything to "a foreign writer, whose lectures were not given orally till two years after" his own earlier ones. But though his earlier lectures (which, by the way, are considerably simpler) may not have been so influenced, I am quite sure that by 1818 he had read and studied Schlegel, and that his later lectures *were* so influenced, whether consciously or not. Schlegel was popular at the time in England, among writers at least, and if Hazlitt had read him, as he had, there can be no doubt that Coleridge (who could have read him in German—which I don't think Hazlitt could) had read him earlier.'

'Of course Coleridge was influenced by Schlegel,' inter-



rupted Eugenius; 'but, for a German, Schlegel wasn't a bad critic. Why labour the point?'

'Only because,' I said, 'though at first sight there is little to suggest that he or Coleridge is responsible for the spate of metaphysical and psychological criticism which has succeeded them, both in Germany and in England, and though it is possible that even if our critics and commentators had never been inoculated with this German bacillus they would still have achieved that fever of exaggeration and that portentous pursuit of trivialities which for the last sixty or seventy years they have increasingly displayed, there *are* in Schlegel some indications of its beginnings. He has more than a touch—how can he help it?—of the teutonic mind which elaborates trifles and makes mountains out of molehills; that tendency of the German intellect to over-elaboration and over-seriousness. In his observations—for the most part sound and judicious—upon Shakespeare's "comic relief" and the way in which he "interweaves his comic characters and scenes with the serious parts" of his plays, he is not satisfied with Dr. Johnson's simple justification, namely that "in real life the vulgar is found close to the sublime and that the merry and the sad usually accompany and succeed each other", nor will he by any means admit that Shakespeare was, on some of these occasions, playing to the gallery. He must insist that it was always done not only with the greatest art (as indeed it was) but with the most deliberate artistic *purpose* and on principles justifiable only when reconcilable with the views of dramatic art which he (Schlegel) has previously enunciated. He must reduce everything to "fixed principles" and suppose that Shakespeare worked always upon a conscious plan down to the smallest detail. There is a touch here and elsewhere in Schlegel of the German's passion for regimentation. Elsewhere you will find many touches of that love of large and polysyllabic definition so dear to the Teuton (and his imitators), which does not define but impresses by a cloud of words. For instance, comparing and contrasting the Classical and the Romantic—a futile comparison of which he is never weary, and which remained a standing subject of

comparison and discussion by all the critics till Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch blew it up in a flame of insight and a smoke of derision—he says:

... the whole of the ancient poetry and art is, as it were, a *rhythmical nomos* (law), an harmonious promulgation of the permanently established legislation of a world submitted to a beautiful order, and reflecting in itself the eternal images of things. Romantic poetry, on the other hand, is the expression of the secret attraction to a chaos which lies concealed in the very bosom of the ordered universe, and is perpetually striving after new and marvellous births; the life-giving spirit of primal love broods here anew on the face of the waters.

‘Except that they carry to my ear a faint echo of Herbert Spencer’s celebrated definition of evolution, what residue of real and simple meaning those sentences may yield upon examination, I leave you to decide. I quote them only as an illustration of that sort of, of . . .’

‘High-falutin’ guff,’ interjected Eugenius, whom I had thought asleep.

‘. . . loose but high-sounding language which has become the stock-in-trade of a certain sort of Shakespearean critic. And again, when he breaks out into his well-known rhapsody:

And this tragical Titan, who storms the heavens and threatens to tear the world from off its hinges, who, more terrible than Æschylus, makes our hair to stand on end and congeals our blood with horror, possessed at the same time the insinuating loveliness of the sweetest poetry; he toys with love like a child, and his songs die away on the ear like melting sighs. . . . The world of spirits and nature have laid all their treasures at his feet: in strength a demi-god, in profundity of view a prophet, in all-seeing wisdom a guardian spirit of a higher order, he lowers himself to mortals as if unconscious of his superiority, and is as open and unassuming as a child. . . .

‘Though I agree with the praise I could wish it expressed differently, and I see in this sort of thing something of the language of our later critics and get a taste of “*the weary Titan*” and the rest of the stuff in the article on Shakespeare in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* I showed you.’

'I should never use "Titan" as a term of praise,' yawned Eugenius. 'They were low-brows to a man—or a Titan. The young Jupiter wiped the floor with them with a handful of thunderbolts. And I agree with you; I don't care for that kind of exaggerated talk. Shakespeare was neither a tragic Titan nor an unassuming child, though he always kept young. He was always like his own proud-pied April and put a spirit of youth in everything. At any rate, that's nearer the right note for Shakespeare than the other. Why can't they take him natural? Bathe in him, swim in him, dine with him, talk with him, jest with him, get drunk with him if you like—instead of sticking him up on a pedestal and, under the pretence of worshipping him, scribble or cut their names on the plinth?'

'Yes, I agree; why must he be either a child of nature, a native-wood-notes-wild unconscious warbler or an inhuman sort of demi-god or a man driven by his passions as if stung by gadflies?'

'Why can't they consider him as a very human but heaven-born poet, as we are told all poets are, who by sheer fortune (or a happy concatenation of circumstances, as you may prefer) had his genius directed into the particular channel—that of writing plays—which gave it a wider and more perfect opportunity than any other form of literary expression could have done to develop itself and to touch all the chords of human feeling?'

'Well, that's quite enough of Schlegel,' said Eugenius. 'Get on with Coleridge.'

'Coleridge,' I said obediently, 'begins his 1818 lectures on Shakespeare by saying, quite truly in a sense, that: "Poetry is not the proper antithesis to prose but to science", and then at once proceeds to define poetry. Now a man who attempts to define poetry must be either mad or a German. And this is how he does it. He says, first, that there must be "something else" in it "beyond the most animated prose" and then proceeds:

What is this (something else)? It is that pleasurable emotion, that peculiar state and degree of excitement, which arises in the Poet himself in the act of composition; and in order to understand

this, we must combine a more than ordinary sympathy with the objects, emotions, or incidents contemplated by the poet, consequent upon a more than common sensibility, with a more than ordinary activity of the mind in respect of the fancy and the imagination. Hence is produced a more vivid reflection of the truths of nature and of the human heart, united with a constant activity modifying and correcting these truths by that sort of pleasurable emotion, which the exertion of all our faculties gives in a certain degree; but which can only be felt in perfection under the full play of those powers of mind, which are spontaneous rather than voluntary, and in which the effort required bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed. This is the state which permits the production of a highly pleasurable whole of which each part shall also communicate for itself a distinct and conscious pleasure; and hence arises the definition, *which I trust is now intelligible*, that poetry, or rather a poem, is a species of composition opposed to science, and having intellectual pleasure for its object, and as attaining its end by the use of language natural to us in a state of excitement, but distinguished from other species of composition, not excluded by the former criterion, by permitting a pleasure from the whole consistent with a consciousness of pleasure from the component parts; and the perfection of which is, to communicate from each part the greatest immediate pleasure compatible with the largest sum of pleasure on the whole.

'That I think, Eugenius, is the most extraordinary sequence of sentences ever constructed by the human intelligence. Was I wrong in saying that Coleridge had a teutonic mind?'

I had observed while I was reading that Eugenius had gradually raised himself out of the long chair in which he had been prone, and was now bolt upright and staring at me with wide eyes, but all he said was:

'Prodigious!'

'Yes. I wonder what Dominie Sampson would have made of it,' I agreed.

'I wonder what Coleridge's 1818 audience made of it,' said Eugenius, still goggling. 'I particularly liked "*which I trust is now intelligible*". You must put that in italics in the book, Yorick. And when he gets to the point at last through his own maze of words he says that "poetry, or rather a

*poem*, is" whatever it is! "*Poetry, or rather a poem*"! A mere nothing! I set out to define astronomy and describe a star! Not that you'd recognise it if I wrapped it up in such a mist of words. So it doesn't matter. But I think Coleridge had much better have adopted Bardolph's simpler method of definition.'

'What was that?' I asked. 'I don't remember . . .'

Eugenius picked up the *Shakespeare* off the table, found the place and read:

'BARDOLPH Sir, pardon; a soldier is better accommodated than with a wife.

SHALLOW It is well said, in faith, sir; and it is well said indeed too. Better accommodated!—it is good; yes indeed it is; good phrases are surely, and ever were, very commendable. Accommodated!—it comes from *accommodo*: very good; a good phrase.

BARDOLPH Pardon me, sir; I have heard the word. Phrase call you it? By this good day I know not the phrase; but I will maintain the word with my sword to be a soldier-like word and a word of exceeding good command. Accommodated; that is when a man is, as they say, accommodated; or, when a man is, being, whereby he may be thought to be accommodated;—which is an excellent thing.

'Bardolph had the root of the matter in him, you observe, and is crystal clear, compared to Coleridge at any rate.'

'And with a greater economy of words,' I agreed. 'Yes, Coleridge might just as well have said, "*Poetry, that is, when words are, as they say, poetry; or when they are, being, whereby they may be thought to be—poetry: which is a very excellent thing*". I have always loved that passage. It was Bardolph's peak moment, his intellectual apogee; and the model exemplar of all definitions before or since. But then he had never been to Göttingen.

'The odd thing is, Eugenius, that immediately after his portentous definition Coleridge adds: ". . . it is remarkable, by the way, that Milton in three incidental words had implied all which *for the purpose of more distinct apprehension, I have endeavoured to develop in a precise and strictly adequate definition*". He really thinks he has done it! Thinks that he has clarified and improved on Milton! Not that Milton's

three words are a definition of Poetry any more than Wordsworth's four: "emotion recollected in tranquillity"; though Wordsworth's describe, if they do not define, his own kind of poetry very adequately, while Milton's are only a statement of the three paramount and essential qualities of poetry. Even so, they come nearer far to hit the gold than Coleridge's diffuse flounderings and repetitive involutions. All poetry, to be poetry, must be "simple, sensuous, passionate". Why try to define further? Though these three words do not define, they give a standard by which you may decide unerringly what is poetry and what is not. They are the acid test for gold.'

'And, incidentally,' interrupted Eugenius, 'they disqualify nine-tenths of modern verse. Hurrah! They ought all to be made to read *Longinus on the Sublime*. What time is it, Yorick?'

'Only half-past eleven. But whenever you mention *Longinus on the Sublime* I know what you mean, Eugenius. In what form do you want it?'

'Bottled beer,' he said promptly. One of the things I like about Eugenius is that he always knows his own mind.

'Very well,' I said. 'You know where to find it. Hurry up. I must get on and finish with Schlegel and Coleridge.'

'Don't mind me,' said Eugenius, as he got up and made for the door. 'You can be like Brougham when he sang. Address the room.'

I have, however, some remnants of pride, and I waited till he returned, armful of bottles, and proceeded to pour Rustic Ale, before I began again.

'I don't think I need quote very much more to prove that, whether either borrowed from the other or not, Schlegel and Coleridge possessed kindred minds. Both are, when they do not permit themselves to be clogged by words, critics of great insight; both insist, very rightly, on Shakespeare's judgement being commensurate with his genius; both are naturally, if rather unnecessarily, indignant with a foolish Voltaire for dubbing him "a drunken savage" or with a purblind Hume for thinking him incapable of any "reasonable propriety of thought"; both . . .'

'What's all this leading to?' interrupted Eugenius. 'They won't stand for much more of this, you know.'

'I am endeavouring to show,' I said patiently, 'that Schlegel in Germany and Coleridge in England are, as near as I can trace it to its source, the founders or chief begetters of the modern exaggerated, unnatural, over-meticulous, unco-clever, sleuth-hound school of Shakespearean criticism which, beginning in deification, has ended in psycho-analysis: which first put Shakespeare on a pedestal and adored him and then laid him on the operating table and submitted him to a sort of reverent dissection.'

'I could not love thee, Will, so much loved I not scalpels more!' murmured Eugenius. 'The third operation was entirely successful, but the patient died of shock.'

'Just so,' I agreed. 'It was partly their own solemnity of mind—Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a Unitarian preacher and August Wilhelm von Schlegel, the son of a Lutheran dignitary—and partly their reaction against Voltaires and Humes who considered Shakespeare an uneducated savage, and those who, while praising him, thought him a mere Child of Nature, which caused them to fall into the other extreme. In their anxiety to show that Shakespeare had judgement as well as genius, that, as Schlegel puts it, he was "a profound artist and not a blind and wildly luxuriant genius", they pile adjective on adjective and make of him something so superhuman as to be almost devoid of humanity.'

'Coleridge, for instance, writes with pedantic scorn of "pedants . . . who took upon them to talk of Shakespeare as a sort of *lusus naturæ*, a delightful monster, wild indeed, and without taste or judgment, but like the inspired idiots so much venerated in the East, uttering, amid the strangest follies, the sublimest truths", and then he adds at once: "In nine places out of ten in which I find his awful name mentioned", etc. Do you see, Eugenius?—"his awful name". In his resentment against the native-wood-notes-wild school, he must make him "awful", his very name "sacred", and so on.'

'This is really worse than the tragic Titan of Schlegel,

and, indeed, Coleridge is throughout more turgid, more word-enveloped, more fuliginous and less to be followed, than his German contemporary.

'I could give you dozens of quotations from both of them to prove my point, but I will spare you. There are their books over there in that bookcase, Eugenius, if you care to verify what I say.'

'God forbid!' said Eugenius, and poured more beer. 'I have never read Coleridge, but I'll take your word for it. Surely you've about finished?'

'Yes. I will simply say finally that, just as Theobald and Malone are responsible for the swarm of subsequent annotators and conjecturers who, you tell me, made your school-life a burden to you, so are Schlegel and Coleridge responsible for the half-idolatrous, half-analytical school of modern Shakespearean criticism which has darkened my later life. As to new readings and conjectural emendations I must add, in fairness, that Schlegel left them alone. Coleridge did not. He discusses and accepts or rejects the conjectures of previous annotators and suggests some of his own; as when, for instance, in a note on *Cymbeline* he spends half a page in discussing whether a compositor might not have misread "courtiers" for "countenances". He also continually (apparently a temptation no commentator can resist) "doubts the genuineness" of lines, and when he comes across any he does not like, simply rejects them as not being Shakespeare's. Sir Walter Raleigh has, however, sufficiently trounced him for his airy dismissal of most of the Porter's speech in *Macbeth*, of which he says that it was "written for the mob by some other hand, perhaps with Shakespeare's consent", and then allows Shakespeare a single line.

'Of which grave impertinence Raleigh remarks: "That is to say, Coleridge does not like the Porter's speech, so he denies it to Shakespeare. But one sentence was too good to lose, so Shakespeare must be at hand to write it. *This is the very ecstasy of criticism and sends us back to the cool and manly utterances of Dryden, Johnson and Pope with a heightened sense of the value of moderation and candour.*"

'Thus Sir Walter Raleigh, one of the few really sound,



sane, and understanding critics who have written of Shakespeare in recent years.

'He, alas, is dead, but two others at least live—and may one of them, though growing old, long continue to do so and to deliver his illuminating and acute pronouncements on literature from the banks of the Cam.'<sup>1</sup>

'I am so glad you said that, Yorick,' exclaimed Eugenius, 'for Q. is the critic I swear by. And while you are about it why don't you quote what *he* says about the Porter and the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth*?'

'Where?' I said. 'I forget.'

'In his book *Shakespearean Workmanship*, at the end of his talk on *Macbeth*. Have you a copy?'

'Of course I have. In that bookcase over there.'

Eugenius got up and found it and turned the pages and read:

'What word? It is the critical word of the drama: and yet no voice utters it . . . it is no articulate word at all. What is it?

It is this: *Knock! Knock! Knock! Knock!* . . .

"Here's a knocking indeed!" growls the porter as he tumbles out. "If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key . . ." "Ay, my good fellow (concludes Q.) *and that is precisely what you are!*"

'Good! I remember now,' I said. 'Q. certainly saw better than Coleridge—and so did De Quincey for that matter, as Q. points out in his next talk. Oh, and I'll tell you another thing: Q. says, very apropos . . .' and I turned Q's. pages again. 'Here you are. He is talking about the "readiness of commentators to say that *someone* 'interpolated' these weak passages" and adds drily: "I hesitate to accept this. It does *not* appear likely to me that a whole set of foolish men were kept permanently employed to come in and write something whenever Shakespeare wanted it foolish."

'And now, Eugenius, it's lunch-time. There's nothing to eat but half a Stilton and a new loaf and butter. Get more beer if you want it, and help me to clear the table.'

<sup>1</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. He alas! is dead too since these lines were written.

'Nothing better than bread and beer and Stilton,' said Eugenius, 'and by heaven we've earned it! You with talking and I with listening.'

He lifted the sheaf of manuscript and half a dozen books from the table to the floor, and as he sat down while I fetched the Stilton from the sideboard, he looked at the manuscript and said: 'You know, Yorick, if you don't curb this itch for writing you'll get like the elder Scaliger before you've done.'

'What about him?' I asked, cutting bread.

'Don't you remember in one of Landor's *Imaginary Conversations* the elder Scaliger comes to lunch with Montaigne and before going in to table stops and glances at the few but select books on the shelves in the outer room.

"These surely are not *all* your library, Sieur de Montaigne?" he says.

"Yes," replies Montaigne gently; "these are all the books I read."

"What!" exclaims Scaliger. "Why, I and my son between us have written more than those."

"Oh, ah, *written*; I dare say," says Montaigne, and they go in to déjeuner just like you and me.'

'As I have certainly read a thousand times as many books as I've written, Eugenius,' I said, 'I consider your apologue to be otiose and inept, and dragged in simply in order to show that you have read Landor. . . . Did you say anything?'

'No. I wasn't even listening,' said Eugenius impudently, his mouth full of cheese.

'I thought I heard someone say "Ducdame".' |

'It wasn't me,' said Eugenius. .

## Chapter IV

### SHAKESPEARE'S BOYHOOD

*And I have met her in the Arden woods  
Where Shakespeare walked with her, a care-free boy,  
And learned the songs that in his happier moods  
He after sang; when he put by the care  
And for awhile forgot the bitterness  
That drove him thence, remembering but the joy  
And the clear spirit that first taught him there  
To sing of simple things and happiness.*

*They were the self-same woods; the ash and oak  
Stood up, as then, and took the English air  
With beauty; the wild bluebells broke  
In torrents down the glades; the veined wood-sorrel ran  
And made the self-same carpet for my feet  
It was for his when his young life began.  
The birds he heard still sang the self-same song;  
The throstle was as sweet,  
The ouzel fluted clear and strong,  
And the wren's little quill  
Made the same music still.*

*Wood-sorrel, veined like Psyche's breasts,  
What do you dream,  
Watching the wood-wrens build their nests  
By the banks of your own wood-stream?*

*Do you remember him when he walked  
Fearing to crush  
You so delicate, tender-stalked,  
In the spell of the noon-day hush?*

*Do you hear the notes that he whistled then  
In his young joy,  
Loud for the blackbird, trilled for the wren,  
Like a happy country boy?*

## SHAKESPEARE'S BOYHOOD

*Did you know, when he plucked your flowers to see  
Your heart of gold,  
That the beauty you gave him would scattered be  
A hundred-thousand fold? . . .*

*Be glad! for the music your wood-stream made  
Your roots among,  
He took; and the magic pipe he played  
Has filled the world with song.*

*And she was still the same,  
The clear-eyed Naiad of his boyhood's days.  
The fields were all aflame  
With orchis and the spotted cowslip's gold.  
And Avon's tributaries  
Still laughing ran down the white hawthorn-ways  
To swell clear Avon's waters as of old;  
Arrow and Alne that nurture Arden's trees  
Whose music the young Shakespeare made his own  
To keep his poet-heart for ever young  
And fall in golden numbers from his tongue  
When he to man had grown.*

### THE NAIAD

'After the somewhat heavy going of the last one,' said Eugenius, settling himself into my biggest armchair, 'this chapter has got to be a cheerful one.'

'If it is going to be all about Shakespeare's boyhood it is bound to be,' I said, 'for I am sure that he was one of the cheerfullest and jolliest boys who ever lived.'

'And a bit of a handful.'

'Assuredly. All proper boys are. But with no real vice in him, and quite amenable if sensibly handled.'

'M'yes,' agreed Eugenius a little doubtfully; 'but do you think his father had very much sense? His mother, Mary Arden, would have been all right—she must have been something out of the way. A lovely woman; I've always wished we knew more about her. But his father must have been a bit difficult to get on with, I fancy. Rather a . . .'

'John Shakespeare,' I said, 'was quite a good fellow. By no means devoid of brains, but his brains were in the wrong place. A fits-and-starts man. A sanguine man. Much too sanguine. All his geese were swans. He . . .'

'He begat one swan, anyway,' said Eugenius.

'He had no persistence,' I went on, ignoring him. 'He always had too many irons in the fire. Look at his reputed businesses. He was (they say) butcher, farmer, corn-merchant, glover, timber-merchant, wool-seller, and I don't know what else. When he made money in one thing he invariably lost it in another. He inverted the proverbial economic balance of swings and roundabouts. William must have got his power of application from his mother. John Shakespeare might have begun, but would never have finished, a play. Mary Arden must have found him an interesting but troublesome husband.'

'Yes. Well, I think we've got *him* taped all right. Now let us get on to William. I don't propose to begin on him till he was about four years old and could invent games for himself and run about and begin to explore.'

'Good. I was afraid you were going to give us some more historico-psycho-biographical stuff about the Infant Genius lying in his cradle and contemplating Posterity. Go on. It's your chapter.'

'It was in these early years,' continued Eugenius, 'between four and thirteen, that he must have acquired most of his unusual and intimate knowledge of country things, of birds and beasts and trees and water and flowers and weeds. And of the operations of husbandry and of seasons and the weather. And of willows that grew aslant brooks and banks whereon the wild thyme grows—and that sort of thing.'

'Yes,' I said, 'and of fairies and pixies and spirits of wood and air and water. He found Puck in the Arden woods and Ariel on Binton Hill. Peaseblossom and Cobweb and Moth and Mustard-seed played with him in Fox Covert on the way to Snitterfield, and Queen Mab filled his head with dreams when he lay asleep after bathing in Welford mill pool. But why only up to thirteen?'

'You'll see presently,' said Eugenius. 'Of course he learned more when he came back, when he was between sixteen and twenty. But then he went farther afield, to the Cotswolds and other places; and it was in these earlier years that he explored Avon's woods and fields, and by the time

he was thirteen he knew them as he knew his own hand. 'He was always adventurous, always observant, always receptive, and what he saw and what he absorbed he never forgot.'

'Don't forget that he had a sister and three brothers during most of that time,' I said. 'Gilbert and Anne and Richard and Edmund.'

'I don't. He was the eldest, and of course he led them all in all their expeditions. But Gilbert was born in 1566, Anne in 1571, Richard in 1574 and Edmund in 1580; so that, you see, his only companion at first, and indeed for most of the time, would have been Gilbert, a mild child and easily led. But at first and often even later, when they were grown enough to be his companions, he went, I think, alone. Not that he was an aloof or lonely boy or selfish or self-centred. He wasn't; he was a very kind big brother, and I am sure they all adored him. He was always, all his life, extraordinarily companionable; but he was always also self-sufficing. He could be happy anywhere, with anything. At first with toys that he would make for himself out of an empty bobbin and a bit of string; and then with flowers and weeds and birds and beasts and bees and with the whistles he made from hazels or the pipes he fashioned from wheat-straws and the boats he carved and floated down the mill-leats—I am sure he often played with Gilbert at throwing in sticks and running with them to see which reached the grating first. And later on with trees and wind and sky and the music of running water—and his own thoughts.

'To the end of his life he could be happy alone or in company. It is the mark of an equable-minded man, of a sane man, of a whole man—and he was all these *in excelsis*; and as the man was, so had been the boy.'

'When you talk of mills, Eugenius,' I said, 'I must put my paddle in. Water-mills have all my life been my passion, they haunt me more even than cataracts. And Avon's mills must have been, by themselves, a liberal education to the young Shakespeare. He was fortunate to have had so many. They are lovely and useful, practical and poetic, diurnal and yet immemorial things; there were mills on Avon, I will swear, before Cæsar landed. Shakespeare did not see Avon

locked and made navigable, for that was not done till he had been dead sixty years, but he saw the mills in the full tide of their glory and their usefulness. And there were more of them then than now; there was a great mill at Barford, and two mills at Hampton Lucy and a mill at Alveston. All these up-stream; and there was Stratford mill, just below the church where he was baptised and lies buried; and down-stream there were mills at Luddington and Binton and Welford and Bidford; and there were mills on the Stour, which runs into Avon two miles below Stratford; and on fast-running Alne that flows by Henley-in-Arden there was a mill at every mile. He could have found a fresh mill-pool to bathe in every week of the year.'

'And I have no doubt he did,' said Eugenius, 'to bathe in and to catch trout out of—I expect there were more trout in his day—and perch and pike and roach. Do you think he could tickle trout, Yorick?'

'Mill-leats are ideal for it,' I said, 'because you can lie easily flush against the cut bank; and there are plenty of little streams beside. I have tried often, but never succeeded; but, just for that reason, I believe *he* could—and did. For he is certain to have tried—what country boy wouldn't who was a boy at all? And if he tried it is as sure as day that he succeeded. He probably fell in the first time, but held his trout and was forgiven when he brought it home, very wet, to supper.'

'I think we are beginning to see the boy Shakespeare,' agreed Eugenius, 'but what I want to make quite clear is that it must have been here, in the Stratford woods and fields, that he learned his country lore. ~~All the other knowledge~~ that different writers and biographers have made such a fuss about—his knowledge of law, of soldiering, of courts and the manners of men in high places and of ladies, of history, of statecraft, of intrigue, and of the varied manifestations of human nature in all sorts and conditions of men could very well (and indeed for the most part must) have been acquired later; but this intimate knowledge of the country could only have been learned when he was a boy. After his second flight from Stratford in or about 1585 to 1586 he was seldom in the country, and consorted only with men of the

town. Besides, it would have been too late. This country knowledge must be learned young—or never. After-study, books, after-acquaintance will never give it. You may know the true English countryman at once; and he has always been a country boy. The town-bred boy who tries in after life to learn the country never succeeds, and when he tries to write about it, it is only his fellow-townsmen who can be for a moment deceived.'

'Very true,' I murmured. 'When Mr. Beverley Nichols writes about thatched cottages and (worse still) Mr. Cecil Roberts about going rustic, the effect on the country-bred man is painful and embarrassing; and when Mr. Massingham discovers and patronises the Cotswolds I am filled with dark and baleful thoughts.'

'I thought his books not so bad,' said Eugenius tolerantly, 'but then you are a Cotswold man. At any rate, you agree that the true countryman must be caught young, don't you; and that, unlike his other casual omnisciences, Shakespeare's country knowledge could only have been gained as a boy?'

'I think it is obvious. I think, too, speaking as a country boy myself, and one that ran wild in woods and fields and streams whenever he got a chance—or took it—that his country knowledge was unusual even for such a boy. And though some have said he could have picked it up later, as he picked up his law, I agree with you that he could not, and that it is of a different quality altogether; and I could prove it by a hundred quotations. For instance, you have twice mentioned "weeds"; now you . . .'

'Yes, yes, purposely. I know what you are going to say,' interrupted Eugenius. '"Weeds." I had marked them down. As you say, some of his biographers have thought that his country knowledge was no more than that of other poets. That all poets know their trees and flowers, and write of them. That flowers are, so to speak, the poets' small change. If it were flowers alone that Shakespeare knew, there might be something in this view, though even in flowers alone I could easily show that Shakespeare has a far wider range and a far more *intimate* understanding of them than any other poet, whether of his own or any other age.



Milton can catalogue his flowers, too, but he never gives you the impression that he has picked them himself; nor even that he has particularly observed them growing. He will bid you bring the rathe primrose, the tufted crowtoe and pale jessamine, the white pink and the pansy freaked with jet, the glowing violet, the musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine, with cowslips wan that hang the pensive head, to strew the laureat hearse where Lycid lies, but apart from the fact that they couldn't all have been in flower at the same time of year, it sounds rather as if he were ordering them from the flower-shop. His epithets are not too good either; violets do not glow, honeysuckle is rather untidy than well-attired, and cowslips never look pensive to me. As to amaranthus, I doubt if he ever saw one, but it is a lovely quadrisyllable.

'It is noticeable, too, if you match Shakespeare's list of flowers with those of any other poets, that it is by his wild flowers rather than his garden ones that he bears away the bell. Few poets mention any but the very commonest, and those they do mention are generally reminiscent of their nursery rhymes. But when Shakespeare mentions a wild flower you know that he has seen it often, growing; that he has plucked it with his own fingers and stroked it across his face and moved its petals aside to look into its golden stamens (as you said in that verse about wood-sorrel), and that he knows every mark and spot that it has. You say, Yorick, that you were a country boy, as was I; but, honour bright, did you ever notice that a cowslip was "cinque-spotted" till Shakespeare told you?'

'I don't think I did,' I confessed; 'not so consciously, anyway, as to have told anyone else, though when he told me—I mean when I first read it—I had not got to wait till I could pick a cowslip again to see what he meant. I saw it then and there. The five spots were in my mind, but it took him to make me see them. That, of course, is the business of a poet—whether about red spots in cowslip bells or emotions in the human heart. Tennyson, I imagine, was the only other poet who was sometimes as intimately accurate as he. Do you remember his horse-chestnut flower? In

*Aylmer's Field*—a neglected poem, though immeasurably better than his *Enoch Arden*—where he describes the young flush on Leolin's cheek as being "like to the islet in the chestnut bloom". It is a red quite different from any red in any other flower—but, there again, I admit it was Tennyson who drew my attention to it.

'You are always distracting me from the point,' said Eugenius. 'I'm not going to talk about Tennyson and his flower-knowledge. It is Shakespeare's knowledge of *weeds* that I want to stress. It is peculiar to him. No other poet is so curious of weeds or so hail-fellow with them as he, and it is that every-day familiarity that stamps him as the noticing country boy he was. A man may learn the names of flowers from his suburban garden or even from florists' shops or seedsmen's catalogues. Weeds he must learn from personal acquaintance, on country rambles or hard experience in ploughing neglected land. I've got down a few of the places where he reels off their names.' And Eugenius produced the usual scribbled-on envelopes and read:

'Cordelia meets Lear, "as mad as the vex'd sea; singing aloud":

Crowned with rank fumiter and furrow-weeds,  
With harlocks, hemlock, nettles, cuckoo-flowers,  
Darnel and all the idle weeds that grow  
In our sustaining corn.'

'I thought it was "burdocks",' I murmured.

'Well, it isn't, it's "harlocks". Don't interrupt,' said Eugenius, and went on: 'The Duke of Burgundy in *Henry V* bemoans how "poor and mangled France" sees:

her hedges even-pleached,  
Like prisoners wildly overgrown with hair,  
Put forth disordered twigs; her fallow leas  
The darnel, hemlock, and rank fumitory  
Doth root upon, while that the coulter rusts  
That should deracinate such savagery;  
The even mead, that erst brought sweetly forth  
The freckled cowslip, burnet and green clover,  
Wanting the scythe, all uncorrected, rank,  
Conceives by idleness, and nothing teems  
But hateful docks, rough thistles, kecksies, burs, . . .

'No one but a country boy—and one who had held a pruning hook in his hand and pleached a hedge (and, probably, held plough-handles too) could have written that. You *know* that he has seen with his own eyes such tangled hedges and such unploughed arable and neglected pasture.'

'It doesn't say very much for John Shakespeare's—or Stratford's—farming. England ought to have recovered from the Wars of the Roses by then; but I suppose it was in the plague years that he saw it. I think you have sufficiently made your point about weeds, Eugenius. There are dozens of other passages you could quote, I know, but you can go on to Shakespeare's flowers, particularly his wild flowers, now.'

'Very well,' said Eugenius, 'but I must just note the Gardener in *Richard II* and his extensive acquaintance with weeds and caterpillars, to say nothing of his nice knowledge of the art of pruning fruit trees. Shakespeare quite obviously dragged him into the play simply in order to air his own knowledge, acquired, no doubt, in his parents' garden at Stratford. And do not forget that Imogen strews the supposed grave of Posthumus "with wild wood-leaves *and weeds*".

'As to flowers, you could fill a volume with Shakespeare's flower passages alone. To take the best of all first, the flowers that Perdita so prettily says the frightened Proserpine let fall from Dis' waggon as she was being carried away:

. . . daffodils  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty: violets dim  
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes  
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses  
That die unmarried ere they can behold  
Bright Phœbus in his strength . . .  
. . . bold oxlips and  
The crown-imperial; lilies of all kinds  
The flower-de-luce being one.

'*Dim* violets, you observe, not glowing like Milton's; and his daffodils dance in the lustral air of March quite as gaily in a single line as Wordsworth's do in twenty-four; and he gives the iris its even lovelier other name.'

'Moreover,' I added, 'no one but a country boy finds oxlips—and Shakespeare mentions them in several other places—and crown-imperials are seen only in cottage gardens to this day.'

'Quite so. Perdita's was a "rustic garden" and full of sweet kitchen herbs besides these flowers, and stocks and pinks, rosemary and rue and hot lavender; mints, savory, marjoram and marigolds "that go to sleep with the sun"'. Shakespeare was very knowledgeable about herbs as well as flowers, and it was in his mother's garden at Stratford that he found them. She, I think, was the gardener. John Shakespeare was too busy, bouncing about to markets and button-holing neighbours and attending parish and vestry meetings. And the young William, I have no doubt, helped her and was quite as handy with the dibble, planting slips for her (like Perdita), as he was with his slash-hook pleaching hedges or with his pruning-knife among the walled apricots.'

'I expect Mary Arden had a still-room,' I said, 'and made all sorts of lovely essences and distillations and creams and emollients and febrifuges and ointments and herbal remedies for children (Gilbert, I am sure, was delicate, for he either died too soon or lived to an incredible age) and cordials and home-made wines.'

'Surely,' said Eugenius. 'I wish more people would do it now. Why don't you start a still-room, Yorick? Or make home-made wine, anyway?'

'I've often wanted to. But I couldn't do it myself and I can't afford a still-room maid. I should call her Mopsa, and she should be dressed in pale lavender patterned with white moss-roses. I couldn't even make sloe-gin this year. Gin costs too much. You could get a gallon for five shillings before the last war.'

Eugenius consulted his envelopes again. '*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, of course, full of flowers, and I need hardly quote from it; but *As You Like It* has no flowers to speak of, though you might have thought to find plenty in the forest of Arden.'

'It was winter, I think, in the forest during most of the action of the play,' I said. "'Blow, blow, thou winter wind";

"Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky"; "Here shall he see no enemy but winter and rough weather." Besides, Rosalind's Forest of Arden could not have been Shakespeare's Arden (except in name), for there was a tuft of olives in it—to say nothing of a hungry lioness. I notice, by the way, that Schlegel assumes that the Forest of Arden was the Ardennes! But what do you think, Eugenius, of *love-in-idleness*, with the juice of which Oberon and Puck anointed people's eyelids with such embarrassing results? It has always seemed strange to me that Shakespeare should have given to so common a wild-flower as the field or mountain pansy (whichever it was) such intriguing and exciting possibilities. Do you think the young Shakespeare experimented with it whenever he found anyone asleep in the fields?"

'Probably, just as he collected fern-spore in the hope of making himself and Gilbert invisible when he went poaching. It is as well he did not succeed with the pansy juice, for neither Oberon nor Puck ever tells us what the "other herb" was—the antidote. The Stratford Colins and Phillidas would have been left in a fine tangle.'

'Wait a minute, Eugenius,' I said, picking up Shakespeare and finding the play. 'I'm not so sure about that. Oberon *does* tell us what the "other herb" (which he first mentions in Act II, Sc. 2) was. In Act IV, Sc. 1, when he wakens Titania "by touching her eyes with an herb", he says:

Be as thou wert wont to be,  
See as thou wert wont to see;  
*Dian's bud* o'er Cupid's flower  
Hath such force and blessed power.'

'So he does,' said Eugenius, taking the book. 'I'd clean forgotten that. But what was or is Dian's bud?'

'I don't know for sure; but you'll agree that it was "an herb", and not a flower like the wild pansy, for Oberon twice so describes it. And a very knowledgeable Shakespeare-lover told me the other day that he thought it was wormwood—*Artemisia*, the herb of Artemis or Diana—and I'm inclined to agree with him.'

'So am I,' said Eugenius. 'Sound fellow. It *would* be

something ascetic and medicinal, not sweet. A corrective, a febrifuge. Useful thing to know. 'Though,' he added drily, 'the only modern use wormwood is put to is to flavour absinthe—or was, when that stuff was the inspiration of budding artists and poets in Paris.'

'Before we leave the flowers,' I said, 'which do you think was Shakespeare's favourite flower?'

'The cowslip certainly,' answered Eugenius, 'and a good country choice, too. He never leaves it out of any bunch he picks, and he describes it with affectionate variation. The best, of course, is in *Cymbeline*, the lovely description of Imogen asleep and—

... on her left breast a mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops  
'i th' bottom of a cowslip.

Twice or three times elsewhere he calls it "cinque-spotted"; it is "freckled" in Perdita's garden; Titania's dew-gathering Fairy tells us that:

The cowslips tall her pensioners be;  
In their gold coats spots you see;  
These be rubies, fairy favours,  
In those freckles live their savours;  
I must go seek some dew-drops here,  
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.

And you will find them scattered all over his plays and poems. I had not finished with wild flowers, though. *Cymbeline* reminds me. There are plenty there; for instance, the flowers with which Arviragus promises he will always sweeten Fidele's sad grave—

thou shalt not lack  
The flower that's like thy face, pale primrose, nor  
The azured hare-bell, like thy veins, no, nor  
The leaf of eglantine.

And the noticeable thing about all Shakespeare's flowers, in all his plays, is that they are all real and fresh and morning-gathered. They are all scented with the spring and come "like the sweet South, That breathes upon a bank of violets, stealing and giving odours".'

'So much for flowers, we have no place for more,' I said. 'If anybody wants them, Eugenius, he will find them in a book (published in 1854), *Plant Lore and Garden Craft of Shakespeare*, by H. N. Ellacombe—who must, I think, have been a distant relative of mine. I have never read the book, but I've no doubt it is sound and comprehensive. The author also wrote a book on *Shakespeare as an Angler*, which I've always wanted to get, for the boy Shakespeare certainly went fishing in every kind of way, legitimate and otherwise, and I expect he returned to the gentle pursuit on his retirement. It is a pity he could not have lived to meet Izaak Walton. They would have loved each other. And now, tell me, what also did the boy Shakespeare do before he was thirteen-and-a-half?'

'Well, of course, he went birds'-nesting, and thereby learned a lot about birds; and he caught butterflies, and pinched foxglove bells to imprison bees and hear their angry buzzing; and he found snake-skins—enamell'd skins wide enough to wrap a fairy in—and brought them home with all sorts of other treasures, like thorny hedgehogs, which he said must be kept in the kitchen to eat the beetles black; and blindworms, which frightened the maids; and he put newts in the water-butts and made pets of young jackdaws and magpies, which he taught to talk till they found an end (as they generally do, because you have to clip their wings) by falling into those same water-butts, and . . .'

'Yes,' I said, 'there would be plenty of jackdaws in the church tower, and as for magpies, they still abound all about Stratford. I could find you two or three magpies' nests to-morrow—no, hardly, but say about the end of March—in a double hedge down by where Snottery brook runs into Avon. On the other side Stour comes in and makes a narrow peninsula. I have camped there often, and the place is full of birds. A magpie's nest with its roof must always have been a treasure to a country boy. That—and a kingfisher's because they are not so easy to come at, and they smell dreadfully—worse than an owl's. And a long-tailed tit's because it is both beautiful and rather rare; and . . . oh, all of them. I wish I could go birds'-nesting again!'

'Well, you can't at your age,' said Eugenius rudely. 'But *he* did, of course: he climbed tall elms for rooks' nests and to make the young birds fly at rook-shooting time—what does Hamlet say?

Exposing what is mortal and unsure . . .  
Even for an egg-shell!

—and oaks, in Arden and other woods, for sparrow-hawks; and this tall-tree-climbing was very useful to him afterwards, as you'll see; and he scrambled up slanting willows for tits' nests and beeches for woodpeckers' and . . .'

'I could show you a hundred willows growing aslant brooks within a mile of Stratford,' I interrupted. 'It's a way they have. Like on the young Cherwell or . . .'

'I thought this was *my* chapter, Yorick! Anyway, I've nearly done this part. Only, talking about birds, we forgot to add falconry to the list of Shakespeare's sports. Of course, he couldn't, as a boy, have flown hawks himself, any more than he can have had a gun to shoot geese and choughs. But he must often have followed a day's hawking and watched the haggard falcons fighting at partridge and other birds. A falcon "towering" is one of his favourite similes for pride or emulation or ambition. More often, perhaps, he would have followed the hawking down Avon banks for water birds and a fat mallard or so, or the nobler flight at heron. He certainly knew a hawk from a handsaw—though at a great height when you cannot see the heron's legs outstretched behind him it wouldn't be so easy.'

'He knew all about hawking, anyway,' I said, 'and he had a hawking eye; but you've said nothing about his going to school, Eugenius. Don't you intend to?'

'His biographers have said all there is to say—and conjectured a great deal more,' he replied. '*You* can do that part, Yorick.'

'Very well,' I said. 'Well, then, he no doubt went daily to the Free Grammar School at Stratford, and probably began to go there while very young. They began early in those days. I dare say he began to go in 1568, when he was four years old. His father was High Bailiff in that year and things were going well with him. If he went on as a scholar till 1577-8,



when John Shakespeare's affairs had begun to take a turn for the worse—about which time his biographers suggest that he was taken away from school and put to his father's trade—he would have had ten years of schooling. Latin was then still the language of education; it was still scholastically, if not classically, a living language. Latin was not only taught but was used to teach other things. Instructions were given *in Latin*. He would have been well grounded in Latin if in nothing else. He had good masters, too. From 1570 to 1572, Walter Roche, B.A. of Corpus, Oxford, and a Fellow of that college, and from 1572 to 1574, Simon Hunt, B.A. of the same college. Simon Hunt left in 1574 and went to the Catholic College at Douai and thence to Rome, where he became a Jesuit in 1578—facts which may or may not be significant. He would have had the young Shakespeare under him when he was from ten to twelve years old, an impressionable age. He would have been soaked in school Latin much more thoroughly than you and I were, Eugenius, and though by Ben Jonson's standard he might seem to have little knowledge of it, I fancy that at twelve or thirteen he knew more of Plautus and Seneca and the Eclogues of Baptista Mantuanus than you or I knew of our Cicero and Livy and Cæsar when we left school. And, as you say, he had that kind of mind that never let go anything it had learned.'

'They might have taught him to write better,' said Eugenius. 'I don't mean ~~better~~ plays or poetry, but better handwriting.'

'They taught him "Old English". Unfortunately, it was the very worst time possible for handwriting. Printing had just come in. The careful professional scribes were fast disappearing and ordinary laymen had not yet learned to write. For the matter of that, they never have. Manuscript is a lost art. And now, Eugenius, tell me what happened when Shakespeare was thirteen. You have excited my curiosity. You look like the cat that has just eaten the canary.'

Eugenius' ingenuous face took on an air of authority. I hastened to fetch the sherry decanter and pour glasses for both of us and composed myself to listen; while he, having

drunk, took from his pocket a sheet of paper, not a mere envelope this time.

'The biographers say, you know,' he began, 'that the young Shakespeare probably left school in 1577, when thirteen years old, to help his father. That his father took him away from school is one thing; that he consented to help his father in the peculiarly odious trade of butchering is quite another: and rests solely—*solely*, mind you—on the hearsay evidence of a garrulous old gossip called Aubrey, who collected material about celebrities for Anthony-à-Wood for his *Athenæ Oxonienses* some fifty years after Shakespeare's death and therefore more than ninety years after the gossip he records. What Aubrey wrote was this:

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford. His father was a butcher *and I have been told heretofore by some of the neighbours* that he exercised his father's trade, but when he killed a Calfe he would doe it in a *high style* and make a speech.

'Everyone seems to swallow this loose piece of third-hand gossip—or, as I think, of sheer invention—at any rate as regards the "high style" and "speech-making". It is, to me, most obviously post-hoc-derivative. "Shakespeare was an actor and wrote plays. And you say his father was a butcher? And did he help him in his business? Yes? Then, of course, he declaimed when he killed a calf!" I've no use for Aubrey. Let him hang a calf-skin on his own recreant hide!'

'I entirely agree, Eugenius,' I said. 'I have always considered that "high style" speech-making calf-story to be an obvious invention, gross as a mountain, open, palpable. A mere gloss by Aubrey on the fact that John Shakespeare was, at some time, a butcher. Why, we do not even know that he was still doing any butchering in 1577. I know something of evidence. In the course of my thirty years as a lawyer a great many Aubreys have passed through my hands as witnesses. A very common and very dangerous type. Yes-men. I would never have put Aubrey in the box if he offered himself as a witness on my client's side, and I should sardonically have rejoiced (like Cromwell before the battle of Dunbar) when I saw him put in the box against me. He was out for

gossip, he got it, and having got it, embroidered it. He would have been torn to shreds by any cross-examining counsel. Well, what then? What *did* happen?’

‘I think his father did remove him from school and did wish him to help in his then declining businesses—butcher-ing probably included. I think it was against his mother’s wish. I think young William refused, or at least showed the strongest dislike and reluctance. I think John Shakespeare stamped and stormed. I think there was a deuce of a family row.’

‘Yes?’ I said, and poured more sherry. ‘And what did William do?’

‘What would *you* have done?’ asked Eugenius, looking at me over the top of his wine-glass.

‘I don’t know. What *could* I do? . . . I could have run away, I suppose. . . .’

‘*That’s just what young Shakespeare did do!*’ said Eugenius, and emptied his glass.

‘You seem very sure about it,’ I said, staring at him. ‘Where did he run away to?’

‘Why, to sea, of course,’ said Eugenius simply. ‘When an English boy runs away, where else does he run to?’

‘There’s something in that, Eugenius,’ I said, laughing. ‘But you’ll have to support your theory with some plausible evidence. What port did he run to? Where did he go? What . . .’

‘Don’t be afraid. I’ll support it all right if you’ll be patient. First of all, tell me, Yorick, how many shipwrecks are there in Shakespeare’s plays?’

‘Shipwrecks? shipwrecks?’ I babbled. ‘Well, of course, there’s the one in *The Tempest* and . . . and . . . let me see. Oh yes, there’s a shipwreck, isn’t there, in *Pericles*?’

‘Well, the apparently dead Thaisa is thrown overboard in a chest during a storm and the ship nearly founders, but I think it got to Tharsus without being actually wrecked. But I count it as a shipwreck: I think I ought to count it as *two*, because Act III, Sc. 2, begins:

EPHESUS, *a room in Cerimon’s house. Enter Cerimon, a Servant and some persons who have been shipwrecked.*

So, even if Pericles' own ship got to Tharsus safely, some ship was wrecked off Ephesus. Go on; what other shipwrecks are there?"

'I really cannot think of any more at the moment,' I admitted. 'How many are there?'

'Five, five at least,' said Eugenius triumphantly. 'Do I know my Shakespeare better than you, Yorick? Oh, what a fall was there!'

'Tell me,' I said humbly, and filled our glasses. I was feeling a little shattered.

'What about *The Winter's Tale*?'

'But—but there's no shipwreck there. Antigonus was landed from the ship on the coast of Bohemia and then a bear ate him. But the Captain went on board again and . . .' I hesitated.

'Yes, and his ship was promptly wrecked and he and every soul on board drowned. He had to be, of course, or news would have come back to Sicily—and it never did. That's three.'

'Of course,' I said, 'I remember now. Go on.'

'What about *Twelfth Night*? Ha!'

'Fool that I am!' I said. 'Of course again. It opens with a shipwreck—only you don't notice it much because . . .'

'Because Sebastian and Viola come ashore separately, one lashed to a mast and the other in a boat, and you see no ship and hear very little about it. Just so. But it was a pretty thorough shipwreck. And what about *The Comedy of Errors*? That starts off with a shipwreck, too, and a sort of double shipwreck, as in *Pericles*: the whole play hangs on it—had you forgotten? I tell you, Yorick, Shakespeare was mad on shipwrecks. He could hardly let a ship go to sea without having her wrecked. I am sure he must have been shipwrecked himself once. Look at Antonio's ships in *The Merchant of Venice*. Wrecked one after the other! He couldn't even let that scarfed bark put out from Venice bay for a joy-sail without very nearly sinking her. But I don't want to labour it. There you have at least five definite shipwrecks to go on with and, I think, a certain leaning towards shipwrecks in Shakespeare's mind established. That is point one.'

'Yes, I give you that. And point two?'

'Point two is—where did he get his sea-knowledge and all his knowledge of shipwrecks *from*? We have agreed that, except for his country lore, all the rest of his knowledge—of law, of fencing, of falconry, of tennis, of courts and kings and lords and ladies, of everything else in fact, could easily have been, and almost certainly was, acquired in later life. *But* we did not mention his *sea-knowledge*. This extraordinary, continually dragged-in sea and shipwreck knowledge. What about *that*, Yorick? I say that if you read the shipwreck scenes and also all his other mentions of seas and storms you will feel inevitably in your bones that they are not gathered from hearsay, from talk with others, or from books, but derive from personal experience just as certainly as does his country-lore. If that be so, where or rather *when* could that knowledge have been acquired or that experience undergone except at some date before we find him in London in 1592-3?

'There are two periods unaccounted for. From when he left school to his marriage—five years—from 1577-8 to 1582-3; and from (say) the birth of the twins, 1586, to 1592, six years. I think he saw something of the sea in both.'

'Both!' I exclaimed. 'Be merciful as you are strong! Let me consider this first period first. I will admit that I had not particularly noticed before how much of the sea and of storms and shipwrecks there is in the plays. And I am beginning to see that there is something in your insistence that his sea-knowledge was acquired personally. For though there is much more of soldiering and armies and land-battles than of the sea, that is natural enough, since more than half his plays are of the contentions of kings, the clash of armies, and all the panoply of war. All *that* was in the *Chronicles* and in the stories from which his plays were taken. But they are not chronicles of the sea or of shipwrecks or of storms. There is, *prima facie*, something in your point; but you must first convince me—and our readers—that his sea-scenes and his allusions have the personal note that you say you find in them.'

'And I will,' said Eugenius, looking for a moment at his

paper. 'I shall not give you *The Tempest* scenes. Everybody knows them, and I only ask that they be read again with this point in mind. But even the ordinary Shakespeare lover, for whom this book is being written, does not, I think (I'm sorry if I belie him), often read *Pericles*. So I read you this from the beginning of Act III. I won't inflict that rather doggerel prologue on you, but go straight to:

SCENE I. *Enter Pericles on a ship at sea*

PERICLES:

Thou god of this great vast, rebuke these surges,  
That wash both heaven and hell, . . .  
. . . Thou stormest venomously;  
Wilt thou spit all thyself?—The seaman's whistle  
Is as a whisper in the ears of death,  
Unheard.—Lychorida!—Lucina, O  
Divinest patroness, and midwife gentle  
To those that cry by night, convey thy deity  
Aboard our dancing boat; . . .

In the midst of the storm Marina is born and—

[*Enter Two Sailors*]

1 SAILOR

Slack the bolins there!—Thou wilt not, wilt thou? Blow and split thyself.

2 SAILOR

But sea-room, and the brine and cloudy billow kiss the moon,  
I care not. . . .

'Do you observe, Yorick, the *deep-sea* sailor speaking? "*But sea-room*—and I care not." There is the same professional note in the *Tempest* shipwreck, and the Boatswain there says almost the selfsame words: "Blow till thou burst thy wind, *if room enough!*" These were no fresh-water sailors or longshoremen. They were proper deep-sea sailors who hated a lee-shore worse than the devil. They were long-voyage men. Landsmen and coast-huggers feel that to keep in sight of land is comforting. Where would Shakespeare have learned the true gospel that bids the sailor cry out for room enough unless he had been for a long voyage himself?

This twice-repeated cry for room is to me extraordinarily significant and strong evidence in favour of my theory. And now, here is the shipwreck from *The Winter's Tale* at the end of Act III. There are no sailors here to cry for room; the scene is described by the Clown, who sees it from the shore—but you can hear them crying for it, all the same, as they are driven on to the lee shore of Illyria and all drowned:

## CLOWN

I would you did but see how it chafes, how it rages, how it takes up the shore! . . . O, the most piteous cry of the poor souls! Sometimes to see 'em, and not to see 'em; now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon swallowed with yest and froth, as you'd thrust a cork in a hogshead. . . . But to make an end of the ship,—to see how the sea flap-dragoned it:—but first how the poor souls roared, and the sea mocked them. . . .

'Is there not a suggestion of the eye-witness about that description, Yorick? They may say that Shakespeare described equally vividly battle and other scenes which he had not witnessed (though I don't think any of his battle scenes, with their alarums and excursions, are anything like as convincing as this), but those, as you very rightly said just now, are in the book—in the chronicle or old play or story he was reclothing. *This* was not. *This* is his own. And I am convinced that it was on this very shore that Shakespeare himself was once wrecked.'

'On the coast of Bohemia?' I asked.

'On the coast of Illyria. Yes, I know you are feeling a bit sore, Yorick, but you needn't sneer. I will show you on the map exactly where it was when we come to it; but that won't be on his first voyage.'

'Oh! won't it?' I said. 'Very well. I am in your hands, Eugenius. Go on.'

'From whom, whether in Stratford or in London, would Shakespeare have heard anything to enable him to describe so intimately a storm at sea as this one in *The Winter's Tale* or that other in *Pericles* or that of *The Tempest*? There would have been no sailors in Stratford, nor were sailors (though

that is more possible) likely frequenters of the taverns of his playwright life or of the greater houses where he met his noble patrons. Deep-sea sailors do not haunt the taverns much higher up-river than Wapping-old-stairs. They would not reach Southwark and the Bankside. You would not find them in the Mermaid.

'I won't trouble you with other shipwrecks or suggested shipwrecks, but you might consider all the scattered references to the sea and storms and all the metaphors and similitudes he makes of them. There are hundreds scattered about the plays. The sea is his constant analogy for madness. Lear is "as mad as the vex'd sea". His mother says of Hamlet that he is "Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend which is the mightier"—and so on in a dozen places.

'And what of Clarence's dream in *Richard III*? Is there not a note of personal experience in that?—

O Lord! methought what pain it was to drown!  
What dreadful noise of waters in mine ears!'

'It sounds as if he knew something about what drowning really feels like,' I agreed. 'People who have never tried it talk a lot of nonsense about its being an easy death and about seeing your past life, and so on. But it isn't. I have been nearly drowned twice and I know that it is just horrid, impotent strangulation. Impotent, painful choking, and lung bursting, and roaring noises in your head. Either Shakespeare had once been nearly drowned himself or somebody who had, told him—and was believed. Suppose I concede your second point; and now tell me—to what port did he run? What ship did he take? What voyage did he go?'

'If you look at a map,' said Eugenius, 'you will see that Stratford-on-Avon is about the most central spot in England and the farthest from the sea. To the east the nearest port is or was (I suppose) Boston; to the west, Milford Haven. In the year 1577 the course of empire was already making its way westward. The young Shakespeare went to Milford Haven.'

'I like your certainty, Eugenius,' I said.



'It is not mere guess-work, Yorick, as most of Shakespeare's pseudo-biography is,' he retorted. 'I have other reasons, too. Why does he bring Milford Haven into his plays? It is not and was not then a particularly famous port. Why does he make Posthumus sail from Milford Haven on his way to Italy rather than from Hampton or Bristol or Plymouth? Or why falsely write to Imogen to meet him there on his supposed return? Why but because he knew that port and because the memory of his running away from home and his journey there across the wilds of Wales on foot, taken at that impressionable age, was yet vivid and must be set down for the pleasure of remembrance. When else would he have known "a mountainous country in Wales with a Cave"? It was in the autumn of 1577 that he went, and he probably for two nights together made the ground his bed and slept in Belarius' pinching cave, as did Imogen in her boy's clothes, and fell among friends and was fed with cold meat, as she was, and guided to Milford Haven. There is none of all that in the story he took *Cymbeline* from. It is personal experience.'

'Did he go in the end with his father's consent,' I asked, 'since you seem to know everything?'

'He went with his mother's—or at any rate with her knowledge. She gave him a little money and packed him food in a satchel. I'm not sure about John Shakespeare after that family row. There are plenty of runaways and goings away in the plays. Young Shakespeare was one of the Launces, I think. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Launce left with his father's blessing; Launce of *The Merchant of Venice*, young Gobbo, left, I think, without. You can take your choice. I incline to young Launcelot Gobbo. He was rather a young rip.'

'Well, then. He got to Milford Haven. And then?'

'Took the first ship that would have him. It must have been a small coasting vessel with a cargo of sea-coal or whatnot for Bristol and Plymouth—because he got to Plymouth.'

'Why?'

'Because when they put in to Bristol they found all the

West country buzzing with talk of Drake's expedition to sail round the world, as Magellan had done, but no Englishman yet. That would have fired the blood of any English boy, wouldn't it—even if his name had not been William Shakespeare?'

'It would.'

'Very well, then. The ship went on round to Plymouth. There young Shakespeare left her and pestered the captains and mates and boatswains of the "Golden Hind" and the other four ships till he was taken on as ship's boy. He sailed from Plymouth on the 13th December, 1577, in the "Golden Hind" with Sir Francis Drake, and came back with him to Plymouth on the 27th September, 1580, having been away two years and ten months. You can follow his voyage in the books. I needn't tell it here. That is all.' Eugenius crumpled up his paper, threw it into the fire, filled himself another glass of sherry, lit a cigarette, and leaned back in his chair with an air of a job well done.

'It is a good story, Eugenius,' I said, 'and a plausible. It serves to fill up the gap between 1577 and 1582 better than any I have yet heard put forward. Very much better, at any rate, than that foolish calf-killing and speech-making stuff, and I hope that when published it will have the effect of killing Aubrey for ever and we shall never see that story repeated again. But—but you know, Eugenius, there are some difficulties to be got over yet.'

'What are they?' asked Eugenius, languidly blowing smoke-rings.

'Well, first, what was all this shipwreck business about? Drake *wasn't* wrecked.'

'No, I know. I told you that that happened—Shakespeare being shipwrecked, I mean—on his other voyage. During the second gap, between 1584 and 1592-3: what the biographers call "the obscure years".'

'I see. But why did you send him on so long a voyage the first time? Was it simply because the date of Drake's voyage coincided? That's what they'll say, you know.'

'Well, it had to coincide, hadn't it, if he went?' replied Eugenius, with his usual Humpty-Dumpty logic. 'But it

wasn't that. It was this way. You see, it had become quite plain to me that, *at some time or another*, Shakespeare must have gone on a long voyage, a *very* long voyage. I'll tell you why presently. Well, then, at first I thought that might have been later, during the second gap, and that in the first gap he only voyaged in the Mediterranean, where he was wrecked. Went to Aleppo in the "Tiger" and that sort of thing. But then I saw that that couldn't be, because his shipwreck was the occasion of his meeting Henry Wriothesley Earl of Southampton in Italy and becoming his friend: a circumstance that clearly happened, but has hitherto awaited explanation. So it was clear that if he went a really long voyage it must have been during the first gap. There was more time for it, too, then than in the second. And it was more likely when he was still a boy than when he was grown to be twenty-one and a married man with three children. He was not out merely for adventure then.'

'You have a most plausible, positive way with you, but your reasons, Jack, your reasons—they are not so plentiful as blackberries. Why must he have gone a long voyage at all?'

'A *very* long voyage, I said,' corrected Eugenius firmly.

'Very well. A *very* long voyage. Why?'

'If you will look at the seventh scene of the second act of *As You Like It*, Yorick,' said Eugenius, 'you will observe that Jaques makes a rather extraordinary similitude of dryness. He says of the fool he met in the forest that his brain "*is as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage*".'

Eugenius leaned forward and pointed at me a crushing and didactic forefinger. 'How on earth did he conceive that similitude, unless he had himself been on such a voyage and had cracked his teeth on such a biscuit after shaking the weevils out of it? Besides which,' he added, throwing himself back in his chair (as judges do after crushing counsel), 'who but a sailor in Elizabethan times would even have known that ships lived on biscuits on long voyages—or even that there were such things?'

'By heaven, Eugenius,' I said, 'I confess I didn't know myself. I had never considered that similitude carefully.'

You are beginning to convince me. Ship's biscuits in Elizabeth's time! They could only have been carried on very long voyages, as you say. I dare say they were invented then, for Drake's voyage, for the first time. He was a careful provider and had experience. Has anybody written a history of biscuits? When do they first appear in Hakluyt?'

'I haven't the least idea,' said Eugenius, yawning. 'I shall let somebody else do the research work. You, if you like. All I know is that it happened just as I have said, and that Shakespeare went round the world with Drake in 1577 to 1580. As to the other voyage and the shipwreck, that will be for the next chapter you let me have. I've got it all worked out for you to do your scribbling.'

'Splendid!' I said. 'The next chapter will have to be dull again, I'm afraid—but I'll give you Chapter VI.'

'When you are writing this chapter up I'll give you some corroborative quotations, if you like, Yorick—like the King's invocation to Sleep in Part 2 of *Henry IV*:

Wilt thou upon the high and giddy mast  
Seal up the ship-boy's eyes and rock his brains  
In cradle of the rude imperious surge,  
And in the visitation of the winds,  
Who take the ruffian billows by the top,  
Curling their monstrous heads and hanging them  
With deafening clamour in the slippery shrouds; . . .

or the similitude in *Henry VIII*, when Anne Boleyn shows herself to the crowd and Shakespeare tells us:

. . . such a noise arose  
As the shrouds make at sea in a stiff tempest,  
As loud and to as many tunes. . . .

But it's late now and I am for bed.'

'Thank you, Eugenius. We will go out and look at the stars, if there are any showing, and breathe the February night air, and then to bed.'

So we went out into the porch. There was a torn sky and only one star showed through the racing clouds. Something seemed to brush by us as we turned to go in, almost at once

—for it was bitter cold—and then a blackbird's note sounded from the hazels.

‘Blackbird at midnight?’ I said, wondering.

‘Meredith's February's thrush valentining, perhaps,’ said Eugenius. It was the fourteenth of February.

‘No, it was a blackbird.’

‘More like a boy's whistle,’ said he. ‘Queer.’

‘Very,’ I said; and we went upstairs to bed.

## Chapter V

### SHAKESPEARE'S SECOND SEA VOYAGE

*Mark now how a plain tale shall set you down.*

HENRY IV, PT. I, ACT II, SC. 4.

'I have decided, Eugenius,' I said, 'to give you this chapter instead of Chapter VI, because we have got to get Shakespeare to London and find him writing plays before I can usefully get on with the examination of the modern Shakespeare-myth and discuss the sequence of these plays—about which the commentators all make such a business and all disagree—and the way in which they attribute to Shakespeare himself the varying moods and diverse passions which the different characters of these plays display or by which they are swayed, as the subject or the action of each play demands. As it was for the purpose of discussing those things that we began to write this book, I suppose I've got to do it, but I'd like to hear first how *you* get Shakespeare to London and how far you go, in your account of this famous shipwreck you've promised us, to fill up the great gap in his life between the years 1584 and 1592-3, which everybody else seems satisfied (on the most exiguous evidence) to believe was occupied in the holding of horses' heads outside the Globe theatre. It seems a fairly long time and a somewhat insufficient apprenticeship for his subsequent career, and I should like to see it, or part of it, a little better spent if you can provide it. You said you had it all ready in your head. The stage is yours.'

Eugenius put a single scribbled sheet upon the gate-legged oak table and proceeded to pile logs on the open fire. It was still very cold and my house stands seven hundred feet above the sea.

'This is the latest spring I've ever seen,' he said. 'It is the second of March and as I came up your garden path I did not see a crocus in flower or even the bud of a daffodil.'

'The snowdrops are barely full out,' I said; 'but there is one crocus showing a purple nose and you can see the daffodils pushing if you look. Spring will come with a rush at Easter, you will see. I'm glad it is an early Easter: it makes a longer spring.'

'I hope to God they'll never make a fixed Easter,' he growled.

'Oh, they will, they will. Before you are dead, Eugenius, you will have decimal coinage and phonetic spelling and a fixed Easter and synthetic food, and everything will be standardised from brains to boot-laces. I shall be dead all right.'

'Selfish beast!' said Eugenius. 'I shall be Jack Cade and lead a revolution. Down with standardisation! Variety for ever! Can't you do something with the Pope about keeping Easter movable, Yorick? Aren't you *persona grata* at the Vatican?'

'I don't know this one. But I'll do my best,' I said. 'You are quite right, you know. The Catholic Church is about the only conservative institution left in the world—the only home of lost causes and forgotten loyalties. Oxford, I am afraid, is a broken reed. There might, of course, be another "Oxford Movement" but . . .'

'I hope there won't.'

'Why? The first Oxford Movement was all right. It saved the life of the Church of England for another hundred years, anyway—if that's any good to you.'

'Yes—but what about the second?'

'Which was that?'

'The De Vere Earl of Oxford Shakespeare Movement,' sniffed Eugenius. 'Haven't you read their stuff? It's rather fun. Bacon's nose is out of joint now. *Vieux jeu*. The Earl of Oxford wrote Shakespeare. Went on writing him after he was dead—after Oxford was dead, I mean. Some fellow!'

'Oh, yes,' I said. 'I remember. I did read some of it. A Mr. Percy Allen, I think. But that too is quite old, isn't it?'

There's been another Oxford Movement since then. What do you think of that one?'

'Oh, *that* Movement? Oxford must have had a hell of a cathartic!' said Eugenius, settling himself in his chair. 'But look here, Yorick, let's get on with the Book. You say this is to be my chapter again.'

'You don't seem to have written much,' I said, looking at his single sheet.

'Oh, that's all right. It's all here,' he said, tapping his forehead.

'Now then. Before I begin to tell you about Shakespeare's second voyage—the one in which he was shipwrecked, I mean—I may take it, I suppose, that you are quite satisfied about the first and agree he must have gone a really long voyage some time in his life, and, as that was the only time he could have done it, he almost certainly went round the world with Drake?'

'Well,' I said, 'I've written it all down pretty much as you told it, and I agree that it makes a plausible story—as stories about Shakespeare go. The "remainder biscuit" certainly seems to indicate a voyage of years, and the ship's boy in *Henry IV*, and the noise of wind in the sails in *Henry VIII*, and other similar allusions and similes all seem to suggest that Shakespeare had sailed in a ship of some size and across wide and uncharted seas; *and* it certainly very neatly fills those uncharted years *and* it kills that confounded calf. I will not say that I am completely convinced, but I am as convinced as any of our readers are likely to be, and certainly much more convinced than I am or ever shall be that Shakespeare suffered from brain-storms.'

'That'll have to do, I suppose,' said Eugenius; 'but you are a bit grudging. It seems as clear as daylight to me. Now as to this second voyage. It took place, of course, in what I have called the second gap in Shakespeare's life: the one between 1586 and 1592, after what the biographers call his *Hegira*—though anyone less like Mahomet than Shakespeare I can't imagine. For once, at any rate, everybody is pretty well agreed about this date. Sir Sidney Lee says (Chapter iv. "The Migration to London")—with that



cheerful certainty which you refuse to permit me, Yorick—"It was doubtless in the early summer of 1586 that Shakespeare first traversed the road to the Capital"; and then he goes on to discuss whether he went by Oxford and High Wycombe or by Banbury and Aylesbury.'

'Why shouldn't he have made a bit of a detour and gone round by Daventry?'

'What for?'

'Why, to see the red-nose innkeeper, of course.'

'Oh, he got to know him before. That reminds me. There is still the time after he came back from his voyage with Drake till his marriage in November 1582 to be accounted for. They (he and Drake, I mean) landed at Plymouth in September 1580, and he would have been back in Stratford before November, so that leaves more than two years; and besides that, of course, there is the time after his marriage till "the early summer of 1586"—another three years and a half. He would have been just sixteen-and-a-half when he got back to Stratford, and was no doubt welcomed like the prodigal son. He would have been a grown man by then, with experience of hardships and the glamour of adventure upon him. He had known death often at his elbow, had been present at the trial and execution of Doughty, had seen strange lands and peoples. He would have been restless and dissatisfied with the humdrum, static life of Stratford, and though he would have tried to help his father in his business it would have irked him. Moreover, his father's business was going to pieces or already nearly gone. What could he do really to help? Nothing, unless he sought wider fields; and so—and so (I think) he often wandered away by himself on long, aimless rambles exploring the country, now much farther afield than when he was a boy; caring no more for magpies' nests or snakeskins, but thinking the long thoughts of adolescence about the future and of what he could do to relieve his mother from the pinch of circumstance and make a career for himself. He must have begun, before this, to be conscious of some power within him, and the voyage and the sights he had seen would have quickened that consciousness. I think that it was in these two years that he first explored

the Cotswolds and got to know Will Squele and made friends with Old Double and was entertained at the country-house of Justice Shallow. He probably knew the inns for many miles round Stratford; but Marion Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot, was fairly near, for Christopher Sly's inn was, I feel sure, the inn at the little village now called Wilmscote, which lies in a hollow four miles north-west of Stratford by the side of the Stratford Canal. The inn is still there, and you have probably drunk beer there in your country expeditions, Yorick. It is quite possible that in his walks he may have been as far afield as Daventry and seen your red-nose innkeeper.'

'Who stuck in his mind so clearly,' I said, 'that he had to fetch Falstaff all that way round when marching him from London to Shrewsbury field via St. Albans and Coventry. It is quite likely. I know Christopher Sly's inn at Wilmscote, of course. But tell me, where do you think Shallow's place was?'

'Shakespeare puts it in Gloucestershire, and though he was notoriously careless about geography, I think we ought to keep it there. But it would be more likely to have been in the northern Cotswolds than in the southern. I should place it in that bit of Gloucestershire that pushes up between Worcestershire and Warwickshire by Chipping Camden and Aston Subedge. Don't forget William Visor of Wincot and Clement Perkes of the Hill. Wincot Farm (which you showed me on the map the other day) is just about halfway between Aston Subedge and Stratford, and the Hill would, I think, have been Meon Hill, or it could have been Dover's Hill or Aston Hill or Windmill Hill or any one of the hills of that north-western rampart of Cotswold. I know that others put it down by Dursley and rely on there having been actual Vizards of Woodmancote, which they make into Woncote, and actual Perkeses of Stinchcombe Hill. But it is too far away; and, besides, I do not think Shakespeare would have used actual names. If he disguised Lucy as Shallow, would he not also have disguised the litigants? The very fact that you find Perkes and Vizard near Dursley proves (if anything) that Shallow's place wasn't there. But never mind about these details. Let us try to see the young Shakespeare

back from his long voyage striding about the country, restless, unhappy, filled with vague desires, troubled about his father, burning to do something to help his mother, angry with himself, and thinking, thinking.'

'I see him very well,' I said, 'and not so unhappy neither, nor his desires so vague. I can never see Shakespeare for long unhappy nor his mind unclear. But restless, yes; and consumed with the desire of living. Even if he had never been that voyage—and I am not saying that he didn't, Eugenius—he would by that time have been lifted up and shaken like the branches of a tree in March, as all boys of that age must be, and he, because he was Shakespeare, with a greater wind than they. I see him very well, striding about the fields and climbing the Cotswold hills, thinking long thoughts, as you say, and shaken with desire. In love with love and beauty, listening to unheard melodies, and, I think, already beginning to pipe songs for ever new. I believe it was now that he wrote, or at least began to write, *Venus and Adonis*. It was his *Endymion*—they are the same poem in different syllables—and, allowing for the centuries, Keats was no older when he wrote his.'

'Yes,' agreed Eugenius, 'he may very well have begun *Venus and Adonis* then and have finished it before he went away in 1586, and so have had the manuscript in his pocket on that second voyage and shown it to young Wriothoesley when he met him, in Venice or in Padua. Yes, I think we both see him very well. And then the tragic thing happened. He was, as you say, in love with love; but, when a boy is like that, love has a way of falling in love with him. Anne Hathaway was not the only Warwickshire maid who so fell, but she had the singler aim and hit the gold.'

'Do not blame her too much, Eugenius. How could she help it? How could she help falling in love with Shakespeare? Shakespeare never blamed her or, if he ever did, he blamed himself equally. When in *Measure for Measure* or, more bitterly, in *The Tempest* (Act iv, Sc. 1) he marks the unhappiness that follows from incontinence before marriage (a smirching of love not regarded nowadays), he does not lay the blame on the woman, but addresses the admonition to

the man. And when in *Twelfth Night* (Act II, Sc. 4) the Duke says "let still a woman take an elder than herself" the reason he gives is man's inconstancy. He does not blame her predatory arts. Do not let us, who have not suffered, be less generous than Shakespeare, who did. He at least was always loyal to her, and I think he is speaking for himself and his own conscience and honour when he makes Troilus say (*Troilus and Cressida*, Act II, Sc. 2):

I take today a wife, and my election  
Is led on in the conduct of my will;  
My will enkindled by mine eyes and ears,  
Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous shores  
Of will and judgement: how may I avoid,  
Although my will distaste what it elected,  
The wife I chose? There can be no evasion  
To blench from this, and to stand firm by honour:  
We turn not back the silks upon the merchant  
When we have soiled them; . . .

I have not seen this passage quoted in this connection, but it has always seemed to me very apposite. It is exactly Shakespeare's case. Shakespeare made a mistake, but being an honourable man and, I think, a religious one too, he abode by it. Let us leave this unhappy marriage recorded but undiscussed.'

'Very well; but it always sticks in my throat,' grumbled Eugenius. 'I *should* like to know who Agnes Wheateley of Temple Grafton was. I feel it in my bones that something worse happened than we know of. That special licence of the Bishop of Worcester for the marriage of William Shakespeare to Agnes Wheateley of Temple Grafton, granted on the *day before* the bond of those two husbandmen of Stratford and of Shottery, Fulk Sandells and John Richardson, given to the bishop to secure him against any questioning of the validity of the marriage of William Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway. I don't like it. My thumbs prick. It is *muching mallecho*, it means mischief.'

'You are talking to a lawyer, Eugenius,' I said. 'You need not stress it. I have always jibbed at thinking about it. It looks too ugly. There are horrible possibilities about it. All

the more, then, let us leave them alone. We have no business to pry into Shakespeare's secrets. If any were wronged it was he. If any punished, he. He accepted it. We can do no less. Go on with your story. I notice, by the way, that you have got the technique of the commentators very pat already.'

'How do you mean?'

'Why, you first propound a voyage as a tentative proposition; the next time you mention it, it has become a strong probability; and the third time, an accomplished fact. After that, of course, a "second voyage" comes quite naturally.'

'Of course it does,' said Eugenius, with the patience of a nurse with a fractious child; 'how could it help it? If a man has been for a voyage and then goes for another one, it must be his second voyage, mustn't it? What else, then, could I call it? If it isn't his second voyage it would be his first, but that can't be, because we've just seen him come back from his first, haven't we?'

'Yes, but . . .'

'Look here! You can't do a thing first time twice, can you? No. Very well, then. And even if you could, the second first time wouldn't be the first first time but the second first time, and it is much simpler to call it the second, as I do. I really don't see what you are cavilling at. Clarify your mind, Yorick!'

'Thank you, Eugenius. I've only once seen a proposition better or more convincingly put. Wait a minute,' and I went to the bookcase and pulled out *The Misfortunes of Elphin* and brought it back. 'Someone has just objected to Seitheynin that he was drowned twenty years ago. Seitheynin replies as follows:

They have not made it known to me, for the best of all reasons, that one can only know the truth; for if that which we think we know is not truth it is something which we do not know. A man cannot know his own death; for if he knows anything he is alive; at least, I never heard of a dead man who knew anything or pretended to know anything; if he had so pretended I should have told him to his face he was no dead man.'

'That doesn't seem to me to have anything to do with Shakespeare,' said Eugenius gravely.

'It hasn't,' I said with equal gravity. 'That's why I read it.'

'If you think you have wasted time enough,' said Eugenius, 'I will go on. We have now got the young Shakespeare married. It is November of 1582, and by May 1583 he is the father of a child, Susanna. Instead of being in a position to help his parents he has incurred new responsibilities of his own. No doubt he did all he could. He tried to prop a crumbling house, but he must have felt all the time that it was hopeless; that Stratford was no place for him, and that the power that he felt latent in him would never find scope there. It must have been an unhappy three years.'

'Not all unhappy,' I said. 'I will never believe Shakespeare let himself be long unhappy or his spirit fail. He had happy times. He had his own thoughts and his poetry and his love of beauty, which he found everywhere; and, if you are right, the memories of his wonderful voyage. There were gathering in his mind all the imaginations and airy nothings to which he afterwards gave a local habitation and a name—and he was writing *Venus and Adonis*.'

'Yes. I don't say he despaired or went about with an air of Byronic gloom and self-pity. But they were the worst years I think he ever spent. And then the twins were born. And now he *had* to go.'

'You think that was the breaking-point?'

'Why, yes. I think he would have gone anyhow, sooner or later, for how otherwise could he have helped his family or fulfilled himself? But this clinched his resolve. I think that, this time, he went with the full consent of all his family, father and mother and wife. I think, too, that his mother helped him with money. She would have had a nest-egg of her own or her family would have provided her. I think he left Stratford this time with a sum which, though small, would enable him to make the venture he had planned and which he had talked over with his mother.'

'What was that?'

'A trading venture to the Levant. He wanted to write. He knew, of course, that that was where his powers lay; but

he knew also that it would take long before he could make money by that means—and money he *must* make and *at once*, or as quickly as could be. His voyage as a boy would have let him see how money was made by trading: how a cargo of silks and spices might in a single voyage—not a voyage round the world, but to no farther than Tripoli—bring a man a little fortune. He would have met ships' captains and merchant-adventurers and heard their talk. He knew all about it *then*—I mean all that he ever knew, for where else afterwards did he learn it? Or how came he in *The Merchant of Venice* to talk so glibly and with knowledge of "your argosies with portly sail like Signiors and rich burghers of the flood" and of their owners "peering in maps for ports and piers and roads and every object that might make them fear misfortunes to their ventures"? Or tell how Antonio "hath an argosy bound to Tripoli, another to the Indies, a third at Mexico, a fourth for England"—and so on? Many of his other plays, too, are full of allusions to the riches of the Indies and of the nearer East and of the profits of trading and of ships' cargoes.

'And so, I think, we may say with the same certainty as Sir Sidney Lee that it was doubtless in the early spring of 1585 (the twins were born towards the end of January 1585, and I think Shakespeare could only have waited till better weather came) that Shakespeare first "traversed the road" not "to the Capital" but to Plymouth. What should he have gone to London for? He knew no one there. He would have starved; and he needed to seek fortune in the speediest way possible—by sea. I think he would have made for Plymouth this time and not for Milford Haven.'

'Oh, you do, do you? Why?'

'Because he was looking for a ship's captain and for co-adventurers in trade. This time he was out not for adventure pure and simple, but to make his fortune—all their fortunes, father's, mother's, wife's, and children's—and as quickly as possible. He would have met some of these captains when he landed there with Drake in September 1580. Perhaps the captain of the "Golden Hind" under Drake lived there. It was the port of landing, anyway, the jumping-off place for

Eldorado, the port where sea-captains and ships were as plentiful as blackberries and whence merchant-ventures most commonly sailed. I am not going to argue with you. You can see for yourself it was his likeliest place for what he had in mind. He reached Plymouth, found his captain, who introduced him to his merchant-owners, made his bargain with them to be allowed to have a share—a very small one, no doubt—in their next venture, parted with his little nest-egg to them, and presently, in the spring or early summer of 1585, sailed as supercargo, or possibly, in view of his experience, as mate or bo'sun, for the Levant and beyond.'

'To Aleppo, I suppose, in the good ship "Tiger"?'

'That may not have been the actual name of the ship,' said Eugenius, unmoved, 'though I rather think it was. At any rate, this was doubtless the voyage, his own voyage, of which he was thinking when he put those words into the First Witch's mouth, and I do not see why he should not have used the actual name of the ship as well as its actual destination. No, Yorick, don't say it! I know you are going to tell me now that Aleppo is not on the sea coast. I know that as well as you do, and so, I fancy, did Shakespeare—though he was, as I have admitted, somewhat careless of geography. But what does it matter? I will say, if you like, that the ship sailed to Tripoli, then the chief port for Aleppo and Damascus and the whole of the rich trade of the Middle East. Tripoli would have been the farthest port of the voyage, but some of the cargo of English wool and hides was no doubt chartered to Aleppo, and silks and carpets from thence would be shipped from Tripoli. When a ship starts on a voyage she is always spoken of as sailing to her farthest port of call, is she not? However many ports she may call at on her way? And Aleppo and Tripoli are the same thing to a seaman. Do not cavil at the ninth part of a hair!'

'Who deniges of it, Sally; Sally, who deniges it? The good ship "Tiger", then, was chartered, you say, for Tripoli with merchandise for Aleppo and other places on the way. But why the near East? Why the Mediterranean at all? Why didn't Shakespeare try the Indies, for instance?'



'Because, in the first place, as I've told you, Shakespeare was in a hurry, and the Indies would have been too far and the voyage too long; and secondly because, as I've also told you (though you seem to forget everything as fast as I tell it you), he was wrecked, later on, on the coast of Illyria. So it must have been a Mediterranean voyage, and the Levant and the coast of Asia Minor were the ultimate trading points of such a voyage. There is, however, if you are still sceptical, further internal evidence to be gathered from *The Merchant of Venice* and other plays.

'Tripoli is the one Mediterranean port mentioned in *The Merchant*, trading to which Antonio had an argosy. When his ventures are spoken of it is always the argosy to Tripoli that is mentioned first, *and it is that one that Tubal particularly tells Shylock was cast away*; and when I come to tell you of the shipwreck itself you will see from references in *Twelfth Night* and in *The Winter's Tale* that the voyage I am suggesting is almost certainly the one Shakespeare went when he left Stratford to seek his fortune.

'Doubtless all went well till they had passed the Pillars of Hercules and entered the Mediterranean. Then began the ill-fortune which for the rest of the voyage followed the unfortunate "Tiger" till at last it threw her a shattered wreck on to the harsh coast of Illyria. They were chased by Barbary pirates off Algiers and driven out of their course, running for refuge to the north of Sicily and having to come south again through the dangerous Strait of Messina between Scylla and Charybdis. Though beset by summer storms they continued their trading all along the shores of the Mediterranean and among the islands of the Ægean Sea, but were often held up in port waiting for better weather and a favourable wind, so that it was nearly a year before they anchored off Tripoli and unloaded the last of their English goods destined for Aleppo and took on board a rich cargo of silks and carpets and damasks and ivory and peacocks and, I dare say, an ape or two.'

'It was probably one of those that Jessica traded Leah's turquoise ring for in *The Merchant of Venice*,' I said; 'the one Shylock had of her as a bachelor and would not have given

for a whole wilderness of monkeys. Go on with your plain tale. I don't mean to interrupt.'

'The "Tiger", now deep laden but yet with room for more, turned for home. There were yet many ports at which she had to call, Candia and the Ionian islands and the ports of Albania, before she made across to Venice. There she traded some of her Eastern goods—including the apes, I dare say, as you suggest, Yorick—and took aboard Venetian ware of price. It was now the early autumn of the year 1587, two years and more since the "Tiger" had sailed from Plymouth, and she was warped out of the roads of Venice and, setting sail, turned south to come down the Adriatic and round the south of Italy to the Pillars of Hercules once more. Alas! she was destined never to see the English shore again. Hardly was she well out into the open Adriatic before a fierce southerly storm came sweeping up that narrow sea and took her aback and forced her to run before it, with her mizzen gone by the board and her mainmast fluttering a torn rag of sail. But there was nowhere to run to: she was swept past Venice again—no hope to anchor there—and at the very farthest end of the gulf of Trieste, in its narrowest northern point, was hurled upon the barren coast of Illyria. It was exactly at that spot where the Clown in *The Winter's Tale* saw the ship that had carried Antigonus and the baby Perdita go down; where he saw "now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon swallowed with yest and froth, as you'd thrust a cork in a hogshead".'

'And thus,' said I, 'was the First Witch's curse fulfilled!'

'Well, it was, wasn't it?' said Eugenius simply.

'Quite clearly,' I agreed. 'She said she would and she did—and did—and did. Go on, I didn't mean to interrupt.'

'Well, don't if you don't mean to,' said Eugenius, and went on.

'With her, with that unlucky "Tiger", went down that night the young Shakespeare's fortune. He himself, clinging to the mizzen, "held acquaintance with the waves" till he was flung ashore, battered and half-conscious, where he lay till he was recovered by a sea-captain named Antonio; who took a violent fancy to him.'

'Was he the only one rescued?' I asked, for indeed Eugenius's story had seemed so pat and convincing that I was accepting it without question.

'I am not quite certain,' he said, 'though it doesn't very much matter. But I want you to help me here, Yorick, about that and one or two other points. First of all, you have got very carefully to read *The Winter's Tale* and *Twelfth Night* and to collate them—to collate, I mean, every word about or reference to the shipwrecks in both plays. For I am quite certain that the shipwreck in each of those plays is the *same* shipwreck and that it is Shakespeare's shipwreck. To begin with, as I think I've said already, Bohemia and Illyria are, with Shakespeare, almost identical geographical terms, and when he talks of the sea-coast of Bohemia he means the sea-coast of Illyria. I do not know (nobody does) over what great territory Polixenes, the King of Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale*, may have reigned, nor over what principality Orsino, the Duke of Illyria in *Twelfth Night*, held sway, but the latter may very well have been a vassal of the former, and the King of Bohemia may have, at the imaginary time of either play, been the suzerain of Illyria even if it was not a part of his own dominions. If you look at the map you'll see that the top of the Adriatic is the nearest sea to Bohemia proper.'

'I can help you there very easily, Eugenius,' I said. 'Your idea of Illyria being a vassal of Bohemia or of both being under the same sovereignty is not merely an idea, it is a fact. At the time Shakespeare was writing they were both part of the possessions of the same archduke or emperor, that is to say Rudolph V as Archduke of Austria or Rudolph II as Emperor—both the same man. And you've got to remember (which, of course, we all know very well) that in whatever imaginary period Shakespeare set any of his comedies, the period was in fact the period of Elizabeth and the characters, whether English or Italian, were men with the manners of that period. Even in a quasi-historical play like *Cymbeline*, though the period is of a British king in the time of the Emperor Claudius or thereabouts, Posthumus is an Englishman of Shakespeare's time and

Iachimo an Italian of the same period. Now, as I say, when Shakespeare was writing *Twelfth Night* (say in 1601) and also when he was writing *The Winter's Tale* (say in 1611) Rudolph II, Archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor, was also King of Bohemia—the Thirty Years War and the disintegration of the Holy Roman Empire had not yet begun. As Emperor of Austria he also ruled over the land at the head of the Adriatic, which was called Illyria. So that if Shakespeare used Bohemia and Illyria as convertible terms as regards sea-coast, he was committing no great solecism; the more so when you consider that King of Bohemia is an older title than Emperor of Austria, and that an Archduke of Austria who was also King of Bohemia might sometimes prefer so to style himself.'

'Thank you, Yorick,' said Eugenius, 'and hurrah for the sea-coast of Bohemia! I never mind much when Shakespeare is careless about towns and places, but I'm always glad to find that perhaps, after all, he wasn't; especially when Ben Jonson or the commentators sniff at his ignorance. But we've left him long enough on that desert beach under a stormy moon being succoured by Antonio and I've got to bring him into Italy to meet . . .'

'Oh yes,' I interrupted, 'to meet young Wriothoesley. I remember. But you were saying about being uncertain if any besides Shakespeare were saved when the "Tiger" went down, and also about carefully reading and collating those two plays. Why?'

'Well, it's this way. As I say, I'm sure it's the same shipwreck in both plays. Both are on the coast of Illyria. In *The Winter's Tale* no one is saved. All perish, captain and all. In *Twelfth Night* Viola comes ashore in a boat with the Captain and (apparently) some only of the crew.

ACT 1, SC. 2. The Sea-coast  
*Enter Viola, Captain, and Sailors*

VIO: What country, friends, is this?

CAP: Illyria, lady.

VIO: And what should I do in Illyria?

My brother he is in Elysium.

Perchance he is not drowned: what think you, sailors? . . .

CAP: . . . and to comfort you with chance  
Assure yourself, after our ship did split,  
When you, and that poor number saved with you,  
Hung on our driving boat, I saw your brother,  
Most provident in peril, bind himself . . .  
To a strong mast that lived upon the sea;  
Where, like Arion on the dolphin's back,  
I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves  
So long as I could see.

And there we too may see Sebastian-Shakespeare or Shakespeare-Sebastian clinging to the "Tiger's" mizzen and being rolled over and over, to be finally washed ashore farther down the coast, where Antonio, the other sea-captain, found him. For I am convinced that Sebastian for the moment is Shakespeare at the beginning of his adventures upon land. It is only a momentary glimpse. We don't see Sebastian till towards the end of the play, and, after that, the winding up of the last act of *Twelfth Night* is extraordinarily scamped (even for Shakespeare, who had, I'm afraid, rather a way of huddling up his last acts as if he were getting a bit bored with them) and we are not told very clearly what happened to anybody.'

'Sebastian had married the Countess and Viola was to marry the Duke Orsino,' I said; 'but both, I agree, are very much stage-marriages and not intended to endure. If Sebastian is Shakespeare, who was Antonio?'

'Antonio is a very strange person, Yorick; and I want you to consider him carefully. He is, first of all, I think, a Genoese sea-captain visiting Venice incognito as a spy. He wasn't Sebastian's captain, of course. That captain came ashore with Viola. It does not appear, either, that Antonio had a ship in the offing. He seems to have found Sebastian on the shore by chance when approaching Orsino's hostile city under cover of night. You remember that he tells Sebastian that he was not safe in Orsino's city; and when Sebastian suggests that they should satisfy their eyes by seeing the memorials and things of fame that adorn it he excuses himself, saying (Act III, Sc. 3):

ANT:                   Would you'd pardon me.  
 I do not without danger walk these streets:  
 Once, in a sea-fight 'gainst the Count his galleys,  
 I did some service; of such note indeed  
 That were I ta'en here, it would scarce be answered.'

'I see,' I said; 'and you think him Genoese because Genoa was always at loggerheads with Venice, and Orsino, "Duke of Illyria", would have been, as so near a neighbour, perforce on Venice's side. It is even possible that Orsino's city was Venice itself. It is quite a good story, Eugenius.'

'Of course it's a good story, because it happens to be true,' said Eugenius simply. 'But before we leave *Twelfth Night* you might look at Act v, Sc. 1, at the place "*Enter Antonio and Officers*" and read what you see there.'

I picked up *Shakespeare* from the table and turned to the place. 'Here, you mean?' I asked, and read:

'1ST OFFICER: Orsino, this is that Antonio  
 That took the Phoenix and her fraught from Candy:  
 And this is he that did the Tiger board  
 When your young nephew Titus lost his leg . . .

I see what you mean. He certainly had a weakness for "Tiger" as a name for a ship. It does seem as if the name touched a chord of personal memory. Well, go on. How does Shakespeare get to Italy to meet young Wriothoesley?

'If Venice was Orsino's city he was already there with Antonio. If Antonio found him farther down the coast, by (say) the mouths of the Piave, Venice would have been the nearest great city. And as a Genoese captain spying out the ships with a view to boarding further "Phoenixes" and "Tigers" he would have to lie very low. But there is something very queer about him in the play besides that, namely his relations with, his attitude towards Sebastian. The moment they come upon the scene we hear that he has conceived an extraordinary—a really out-of-the-way extraordinary—affection for him. It appears that he had actually, after rescuing him from the beach, taken him to some quiet village and kept him hidden for three whole months, while he nursed him back to strength, before they ventured into the

city. Read Act III, Sc. 3, and you will see both how sudden and how almost extravagant this affection is. He follows Sebastian, he will not let him out of his sight and, when obliged to do so, gives him his purse containing every penny he possesses! Later on in the next scene he risks discovery in an enemy city, a discovery that would mean death, to take his part in a quarrel, mistaking Viola for him. When Viola denies him he is cut to the heart, and his language is more like that of a deceived and heart-broken lover than of a comparatively recent friend. When brought before the Count, a prisoner like to suffer death, his grief is not for that but for Sebastian's supposed ingratitude, and he cries out:

... a witchcraft drew me hither;  
That most ingrateful boy there, by your side,  
From the rude sea's enraged and foamy mouth  
Did I redeem: a wreck past hope he was:  
His life I gave him, and did thereto add  
My love, without retention or restraint,  
All his in dedication; for his sake  
Did I expose myself, pure for his love,  
Into the danger of this adverse town,  
Drew to defend him when he was beset . . .

and so on, exclaiming against his falseness and treachery, and when the Duke asks: "When came he to this town?" he answers:

Today, my lord: and for three months before,  
No interim, not a minute's vacancy,  
Both day and night did we keep company.

'Here, surely, is an extreme and extremely sudden friendship, an almost idolatrous devotion. It was not necessary for the plot, and it is borne in on me that there is some personal memory behind these protestations and upbraiding of this unusual captain—protestations and upbraidings which read almost like some of the Sonnets.'

'Aha! I see you coming, Eugenius,' I said. 'This captain is to be a disguise—or perhaps a symbol, a crypticism—for Southampton?'

'It is not quite so simple as that. Antonio, as I see it, is a dual personality. He is both the captain and Southampton. The immediate rescuer and the subsequent befriender and, for some months, bosom companion. You must imagine for yourself what exactly happened when the young Shakespeare was found half-dead on the beach. Whoever found him took him in and poured oil and wine into his wounds and revived and succoured him till he could fend for himself. It is clear that there was great cause for gratitude, and that also at some time or other during this period there arose some unhappy misunderstanding. But I do not think that it was Southampton who actually found and rescued Shakespeare. I think that it was after he was recovered enough to travel and was taken to the nearest great city—Venice or Padua—that he met and was helped by the boy Wriothlesley and that that strange and frantic friendship sprang up between them—for I am a Southamptonite, by the way, and believe that it was to him that most of the Sonnets are addressed.'

'So am and so do I,' I said. 'I think I see what you mean. Shakespeare is rescued and when strong enough is brought or comes himself to Venice or Padua. He has nothing but what he stands up in, though he need not be quite penniless, for he may have kept what gold pieces he had left in a belt about him. But he would have been in a terrible strait and almost in despair. His venture lost, his mother's money gone, himself a thousand miles from home and nearly destitute. And then, you think, he met Wriothlesley?'

'Yes, in Venice or in Padua, but I think in Venice. Perhaps Shakespeare was brought to Wriothlesley there because as a young English nobleman travelling in Venetian territory he would be likely to be able and willing to succour a fellow-countryman in distress. At any rate, they met and straightway fell in love with each other. The friendship was more violent on Wriothlesley's side, more un-governed. Shakespeare must have been always a man of great charm and so I have no doubt was the boy Wriothlesley. But he, the spoiled child of fortune, born in the purple with a golden spoon in his mouth, would have let himself go the



more expansively of the two, and between two generous minds the pleasure of giving is always greater than the pleasure of receiving. Shakespeare loved the boy, but to accept everything at his hands, to be beholden for new hope for the future as well as for present help and kindness, is not easy—and especially if you be nine years older than your benefactor. There are the seeds of quarrel and misunderstanding and hurt pride in such a relationship.'

'How old was young Wriothsesley then? The wreck, I suppose, would have been in the winter of 1587, and if you add on those three months it would now be 1588. Shakespeare would have been nearly twenty-four and young Southampton not yet fifteen. What was he doing travelling about Italy? I seem to remember he graduated at Cambridge. Why wasn't he attending to his studies on the banks of the Cam?'

'Don't be absurd, Yorick. You know very well that a young nobleman like Southampton though entered at Cambridge probably never saw the banks of the Cam—or at any rate only twice in his life—once when he went up to be entered and the other time when he came to receive his degree,' said Eugenius; and, referring to his notes, 'Yes, he was entered at St. John's College in 1585 and graduated M.A. in 1589. He had succeeded to the title in 1581. He may have kept his first term at Cambridge, but not much more. He was a royal ward, under Lord Burghley, who would almost certainly have sent him out to see the world and to study men and cities and fit himself to be one of England's rulers and statesmen. Even if he put in a year at Cambridge he could have started on his travels about the same time that Shakespeare was sailing from Plymouth. Fourteen or fifteen years old would not have been too young in those days, and if he was old enough to go to Cambridge in 1585, he was old enough to travel in 1586. He probably had a guardian or tutor with him, who let him do exactly what he liked. What else is a young nobleman's tutor for? Italy rather than France was the bourne for all travelling Englishmen. We were not yet friends with our sweet enemy. Calais still rankled. And so, while Shakespeare was

trading wool and hides for apes and peacocks in Tripoli, Wriothsesley was making a leisurely progress through Italy via Naples and Rome and Florence to Venice and the Venetian states.

'Well, there you are, Yorick. There's not much more to be said about it. They travelled back together from Venice to England by Padua and Verona and Milan and Pavia and Genoa and thence, by sea, to Marseilles (touching, I think, at Corsica, which then belonged to Genoa, on the way), where they stayed a little time, and thence home to London by way of Paris. Shakespeare came thus to know all those towns of Italy that he afterwards wrote of in his plays. I think they stopped a long time in Verona and that he conceived a liking for that city. Why else should he have made it the scene of the first play he ever wrote (unless *Love's Labour's Lost* was the first)—*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*? There was reason for putting the scene of *Romeo and Juliet* there, but none for making it the home-town of Proteus and Valentine, unless, as I suggest, a pleasant memory. When they left Marseilles for Paris, Southampton took him to see the Countess of Rousillon, with whom they stayed some time, and again Shakespeare remembered and made use of his pleasant visit long afterwards in *All's Well that Ends Well*.'

'What about *Love's Labour's Lost*—his first play, for I think he wrote that before he wrote *The Two Gentlemen*—did he visit Navarre?' I asked.

'Is not Navarre Languedoc and Languedoc Navarre? And is not Rousillon (whether you think it was the province or the town) a part of Languedoc? René of Navarre was René of Languedoc and *Love's Labour's Lost* is a Languedocian piece. I think, myself, that it was while staying with the countess that Shakespeare began to write both those plays. He had already shown his manuscript of *Venus and Adonis* (a little stained by salt water) to Southampton, and Southampton had promised to get it printed, and Shakespeare had said he would dedicate it to his lordship. And Shakespeare had, of course, confided his ambitions; and Southampton, all fervour and admiration, had encouraged

and flattered him—not falsely, I mean, but with honest, boyish enthusiasm.

‘With all that, nevertheless, there were, as I said, the seeds of misunderstanding and quarrel. With all his generous enthusiasms Southampton was still the rich patron and Shakespeare (his senior of nine years) the penniless poet.’

‘What happened when they got to London, some time early in 1589, I suppose?’ I said.

‘Yes, the spring of 1589. Southampton took him to his town house and wished him to stay with him for always. But Southampton was still a minor. Lord Burghley, I dare say, had a word to say. At any rate, the position would have been impossible—for Shakespeare, even if not for his young patron. He, Shakespeare, was in a hopelessly unhappy position. He shrank from returning to Stratford empty-handed, a failure, an incubus. No doubt he had, long before this, told Southampton everything and Southampton had offered him money—anything he asked for. I think then that Shakespeare did in the end accept a considerable sum of money from him, which he sent to his parents, telling them all that had happened to him and asking them to make provision for his wife and children. That, I think, is the foundation of fact at the back of the Davenant story that Southampton “once gave him a present of £1000 to complete a purchase”. The amount, of course, is extravagantly absurd. Southampton could not have then commanded the quarter of that sum, nor at any time after would he have been likely to make or Shakespeare to accept so preposterous a gift. But Shakespeare so far swallowed his pride, I think, as to accept a substantial sum to provide for his wife and children, and then set himself to write. I daresay that when Southampton found he was determined to be independent he got him, through Burghley or through his friends (Lord Strange, perhaps, or Lord Howard), introductions to Burbage and Henslowe and Heminge. At first, I dare say, he took on any job he could get, but writing was what he was out to do. There was, I imagine, a coolness between him and Southampton at this time. Something of that sort was inevitable. Southampton was presented at court and became

a favourite of Essex and of the Queen. He came of age in 1594 and thereafter had his own establishment. He did not marry till 1598. Hence the earlier Sonnets. Their friendship endured all through these years with periods of warmth and coolness, quarrels and redintegrations, all arising from the same conflict of patronage and pride. In 1593, when Shakespeare at last got *Venus and Adonis* published (I think without help), you observe there the dedication to Southampton is somewhat cold and formal. When *Lucrece* was published, in 1594, the dedication is so much warmer as to sound like the language of real friendship and devotion. Southampton came of age that year. Shakespeare too was just beginning to feel his feet and to be independent. Relations were much easier and I think continued so.'

Eugenius crumpled his paper, threw it into the fire and flung himself back in his chair. 'Ouf!' he said. 'I need a drink.'

'You deserve one,' I said. 'As we neither of us care for cocktails and it is almost too cold even for sherry, I prescribe sloe gin. I have still some bottles of the year before last's vintage,' and I went to fetch one.

'Here is to the shipwreck and the young Shakespeare's fortune,' I said as we drank and filled again. 'I think your story—I mean your reconstruction of facts—Eugenius, is masterly. And your study of the relations between Shakespeare and the young Southampton is, to my mind, at once accurate and profound. I should like to add a postscript to it. It is this: I have always had an idea that Southampton would have liked to have made a sort of tame cat of Shakespeare and I believe that among other offers he wished Shakespeare to accept the sort of position about his person which would have been very much that of a court or private jester. Shakespeare, I think, stayed with Southampton for some time in London after they got there and saw, from what he could observe in other great houses, into what sort of a position he was drifting. He intended to earn his living by his wits—but not in that way. In that way, he saw, degradation lay. Have you observed how all the Jesters—the real Jesters I mean, not the mere clowns—have in them a suppressed but yet clear note of bitterness?'

'Now you mention it, yes,' agreed Eugenius. 'But I've not worked it out. Go on, propound to me.'

'He made a great study of Jesters,' I went on, 'an acute and, I think, *personal* study derived from the observation of those months or years. Touchstone and Feste and the Fool in *Lear* and Lavatch in *All's Well that Ends Well*: they all have it. The bitterness of the scholar and the gentleman reduced to earning his bread by clowning.

'Touchstone carries it off the most cheerfully, but even he lets it be seen. Feste even more plainly, and Lavatch in *All's Well* (though he says comparatively little) most of all.

'Listen to him almost as soon as he comes on the stage with the Countess (in Act I, Sc. 3) to his conclusion: "That man should be at woman's command, and yet no hurt done!—Though honesty be no puritan, yet it will do no hurt; it will wear the surplice of humility over the black gown of a big heart." And again in Act II, Sc. 2:

COUNTESS Come on, Sir; I shall now put you to the height of your breeding.

CLOWN I will show myself highly fed and lowly taught; I know my business is but to the court.

COUNTESS To the court! Why, what place make you special, when you put off that with such contempt? But to the court!

CLOWN Truly, madam, if God have lent a man any manners, he may easily put it off at court; he that cannot make a leg, put off's cap, kiss his hand, and say nothing, has neither leg, hand, lip nor cap; and indeed such a fellow, to say precisely were not for the court; but for me I have an answer will serve all men.

And so on with his stock court-answer of "O Lord, sir!" as good in its way as Touchstone's "if". Lavatch, of course, suffered under the additional humiliation (to a man) of being clown to a woman. Perhaps the Countess of Rousillon had offered Shakespeare the post. At any rate, it is the fact that only the Fool in *Lear*, of all the true Jesters, keeps his bitterness for the world at large and his master's enemies and never spirts it at his master, for though he often underlines *Lear's* folly and blindness, there are always tears in his voice when he does so.

'But then the Fool in *Lear* loved his employer. The others ate the bread of theirs and hated it because of the way they earned it. I shall have something to say later on about Shakespeare's Clowns and Fools and Jesters and Serving-men.'

'Do,' said Eugenius.

And so we went in to lunch, another chapter done.

## Chapter VI

### WAS SHAKESPEARE EVER AN ACTOR?

*Quoth Hudibras, Alas! what is 't t' us  
Whether 'twere said by Trismegistus,  
If it be Nonsense, false or mystick,  
Or not intelligible or sophistick?  
'Tis not Antiquity nor Author,  
That makes Truth Truth, altho' Time's Daughter; . .  
Nor does it follow, 'cause a Herald  
Can make a Gentleman scarce a Year old,  
To be descended of a Race  
Of ancient Kings, in a small space,  
That we should all Opinions hold  
Authentick, that we can make old.*

HUDIBRAS

'Well, Eugenius,' I said, 'I've written out your last chapter and it makes very pretty reading; but, before I proceed with my more serious labours, I think we ought to see if we cannot tighten up some of your loose strings and add an air of greater verisimilitude to your already reasonably convincing narrative. You have got the adolescent Shakespeare to London from Stratford by way of the coast of Bohemia, instead of either by way of Oxford and High Wycombe or Banbury and Aylesbury, the alternative routes by which Sir Sidney Lee and most of the other biographers say he "doubtless" travelled. As there is no direct evidence whatever either way, your route is as good as theirs in fact and considerably better in imagination. But you will see, I am sure, that your story depends for acceptance upon the question as to whether in fact Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, *was* the first protector and patron of the young Shakespeare; and the evidence for that fact

depends, unfortunately, to a considerable extent upon the thorny question of the Sonnets and that infernal dedication to their "onlie begetter".

'And on the dedication of *Venus and Adonis* and of *Lucrece*,' broke in Eugenius, 'and on early tradition, and on Southampton's well-known patronage of poets and love of the drama, and . . .'

'Yes, yes,' I agreed; 'and on ages and dates and the story of the £1000 gift and marriages and comparative probabilities, and all sorts of things. I only said "unfortunately" because it means that we shall have to discuss the Sonnets and to meddle with a controversy that has spoiled more paper than any other, and all because a little thief of a Jacobean publisher wanted to disguise his piracy.'

'Well, I'm a Southamptonite, anyway,' said Eugenius sturdily, 'and I hope you are not going to go over the whole ground or it will be midnight before you begin to discuss the actor question, about which I am curious.'

'I am going to confine it,' I said 'to the Earl of Southampton and the Earl of Pembroke, to Henry Wriothesley and William Herbert. I am satisfied that it must lie between them. That Shakespeare had a friendly patron in London is certain; that most of the Sonnets were written to that friend and patron is equally certain; that he was a young man and of a much higher station in life than the poet is clear; and that when all or most of them were written he was unmarried appears on the face of them.'

'Bearing all these things in mind, how do the rival claims of Wriothesley and of Herbert stand? I think myself you will find that it depends chiefly upon when—between what dates—you think the Sonnets (or most of them) were written.'

'Quite early,' said Eugenius. 'Shakespeare began writing them at once after he got to know Wriothesley—or whichever of them it was who first befriended him. Even while he was writing *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*, in some of those "idle hours" he speaks of in the first dedication.'

'I am inclined to agree with you. But let us see what the authorities say. Sir Sidney Lee, who is a Southamptonite, says in his monumental *Life* that the Sonnets were mostly



written about 1594, but does not say why nor suggest nor explain how Shakespeare first came to know Wriothesley. Sir Edmund Chambers is a Herbertite, and in his even more monumental *Shakespeare* has said quite a lot of things, and on pages 565 *et seq.* he puts the case as between Herbert and Wriothesley very well and (on the whole) fairly. You may be quite sure that Sir Edmund has left "no stone unturned, no avenue unexplored", for I am quite sure that nothing, absolutely nothing whatever relating in any possible way to William Shakespeare has escaped the searching mesh of those two volumes. Being a Herbertite, he makes the best case he can, of course, for William Lord Herbert, and if we can upset or even seriously weaken it our man wins. Let us see what he says:

The careers of Southampton and Herbert show curious analogies. Both are known (pp. 62, 68; Vol. II, p. 228) to have shown favour to Shakespeare. Both were good-looking and had beautiful mothers. Both were the subjects of early negotiations for marriages which came to nothing. Both had amorous relations with ladies of Elizabeth's court and suffered disgrace and imprisonment as the result, though Southampton married his Elizabeth Vernon in 1598, whereas Herbert declined to marry his Mary Fitton in 1605.

All very well; but when I turn to the pages cited I find that the only *evidence* adduced to show that Herbert had "shown favour" to Shakespeare is the well-known dedication to the earl *and his brother* of the First Folio by Heminge and Condell in November 1623 (more than seven years after Shakespeare's death), in which they say that "since your Lordships have been pleased to think these trifles something heretofore and have prosecuted both them *and their author living with so much favour . . .*" they hope—and so forth. To this evidence Sir Edmund Chambers adds (on pp. 68, 69) a *conjecture*:

If Shakespeare was indeed writing for the Company of Pembroke's father in 1592-3, he may already have been in touch with the Herberts, and a projected marriage in 1595 between the son and Elizabeth Carey . . . would be an adequate explanation for the earliest sonnets.

'To which I reply that, against this "if" and "may", we *know for certain* that early in 1593 Shakespeare must already have been in touch with Southampton for some time, because in April of that year he dedicated his *Venus and Adonis* to him, and that, as regards the dedication of the First Folio in 1623, it is at best second-hand evidence and weighs nothing at all if set against Shakespeare's two *personal* dedications of *Venus* and *Lucrece* in 1593 and 1594. If in addition to this balance in his favour you add the traditional testimony as recorded by Rowe, Davenant, and others (none of which exists for Herbert) Southampton stands almost alone, and it was hardly fair to say "*both are known to have shown favour to Shakespeare*" as if the evidence were equal. The fact, too, that the dedication of the First Folio is to Herbert *and his brother* makes it much less personal. So much for that point.

'As regards the "*early negotiations for marriages which came to nothing*", etc., the points that really matter are, first of all, how old were Wriothesley and Herbert respectively at the date when the earlier Sonnets were written (though I do not think the whole series covered any long period), and, secondly, when did they respectively marry? Now Wriothesley was born in October 1573, and Herbert in 1580. In 1595, therefore, which I think will be found to be the crucial date, Southampton was twenty-two and Herbert fifteen. I say it is the crucial date because I think it is the *latest* date by which the Sonnets can, with any likelihood, be supposed to have been written. I think, myself, they were written between 1589 and 1593-4 in some of the "idle hours" in which Shakespeare was also writing *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. We know that in 1591 he had begun to write plays and had produced the three parts of *Henry VI* by the end of 1592. We know that in 1594 he had joined Burbage's Company, and it is commonly agreed that by the end of 1594 he had produced four more plays: *Richard III*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. And by the end of 1595 three more: *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. They were not written in this order (for I am sure that *Love's*

*Labour's Lost* and the *Two Gentlemen* were written first of all)—which is taken from Sir Edmund Chambers own chronological list (on p. 270)—but that does not matter, the point being that here you have *ten* plays written in less than five years from 1591 to 1595. That would not have left Shakespeare many “idle hours” (as Sir Edmund says himself on p. 62) for any other sort of writing, and after 1595 he was, if anything, busier still. Indeed, I have always thought it was generally agreed that once Shakespeare had begun to write plays he wrote no more verse of any other kind.’

‘It seems to me almost self-evident,’ said Eugenius. ‘*Venus* and *Lucrece* were clearly written before he wrote *Henry VI* in 1591–2, though not published till 1593 and 1594. I should say that *all* the Sonnets were written before 1594.’

‘So I think. But the Herbertites must put them as late as they possibly can. If any of them were written (say) before 1591, it makes Herbert impossible, for no poet, however fond, would begin by “desiring increase” from a boy of ten. Even if they were not begun till 1595 you would hardly expect the poet to be so impatient of the stubborn celibacy of a boy of fifteen as to beg him in successive sonnets to get a child before he is forty, to look in his glass and tell his face that now is the time to form another like it, and to call him “unthrifty loveliness” for not immediately doing so. Whereas in 1591 Southampton was eighteen and in 1595 twenty-two, and (for those days) was of ripe, and getting almost over-ripe, marriageable age.

‘Sir Edmund Chambers sees the point, of course, and tries to meet it. He says (p. 566):

The case for Herbert was elaborately argued by Thomas Tyler and others thirty years ago and I think it was mishandled. Obsessed by Mary Fitton, they put the bulk of the Sonnets in 1598–1601 . . .’

‘That’s absurd,’ interjected Eugenius.

‘Nothing is absurd to Shakespearean disputants:

. . . in 1598–1601, after Herbert had come to London, and related the early group, urging marriage, to an abortive match between him and Lady Bridget Vere, which was under discussion

in 1597. If the Sonnets are of 1593-6, it might well be thought that Herbert, born in 1583, was too young to be their subject, even though he was more naturally to be called a "boy" at that time than Southampton. . . .

'Did Shakespeare call his friend a "boy" in the Sonnets, Yorick?' interrupted Eugenius.

'Not in the first dozen, anyway,' I said, 'for I know them by heart—but never mind that for the moment—let me go on with his plea: "*But oddly enough although Tyler used the Sidney Papers he failed to discover the evidence which they contain, that an attempt had been made, as early as 1595, to betroth Herbert at the tender age of fifteen.*" For the rest, Sir Edmund Chambers is again "*struck by the fact that, although Southampton was still alive, it was not to him but to Herbert and his brother that F.1. was dedicated*", and he concludes: "*On the whole, therefore, I think that if we are to look in the ranks of the higher nobility, it is Herbert rather than Southampton who affords the most plausible identification for Shakespeare's friend.*"'

'Is that the best he can do?' asked Eugenius. 'If so, I don't think much of his case. For even if, against his own remark that Shakespeare could have had few "idle hours" after 1591, he puts the date of the first Sonnets as late as 1595 (and of course the Herbertites must put it as late as they possibly can), fifteen years old is a little young to have been besought, for the space of some sixteen sonnets, to reproduce itself. And if the word "boy" does not occur in these adjurations is not that rather a blot in Sir Edmund's argument? And, finally, how does the discovery that in 1595 there was a proposal to *betroth* (not to marry) Herbert to Sir George Carey's daughter help his case? It seems to me to go far to destroy it. You do not flog a willing horse; you do not need so vehemently to urge a youth to marry at the moment when he is apparently showing every willingness to do so. But if the Sonnets were written, as we think, some before 1591 and all before 1595, there would have been every reason so to adjure and urge Southampton, who was in those years between eighteen and twenty-two and had shown as yet no indication towards matrimony, his intrigue with

Elizabeth Vernon not having begun before 1595. You were right when you said that 1595 would be found to be the crucial date.'

'I can add some further evidence as to that,' I said, 'some really definite evidence which Sir Edmund Chambers seems rather strangely to have forgotten for the moment. I mean the evidence of Francis Meres. If he, in the year 1598, can speak of "honey-tongued Shakespeare, witness his *Venus and Adonis*, his *Lucrece*, his sugared *Sonnets* among his private friends" it shows that Tyler's date of 1598 to 1601 is (as you said) absurd, and it goes very far to show that we are right in thinking they were all written by 1595. For it is unlikely that Meres, who was apparently not personally acquainted with Shakespeare, would have seen these privately circulated *Sonnets* till some considerable time after they were written, and he probably wrote his *Wit's Treasury* some little time before it was published. Meres' evidence alone (and it is the only real, *written* evidence that exists) seems to me to put Herbert out of court.

'I had forgotten one other point Sir Edmund Chambers makes as against Southampton's case. "*If it were sound*," he says (p. 565), "*one would expect to find some hints in the sonnets of the major interests of Southampton's early life: his military ambitions, his comradeship with Essex, the romance of his marriage.*"

'Why? I ask why, in heaven's name, should one expect to find anything of the sort? The *Sonnets* did not set out to be a metrical biography of Southampton—or of whomsoever the person was to whom they were written. They were poems of affection and upbraiding, addressed to a youth by one who loved him, and ceased when the relations that gave rise to them ended. They had ceased long before Southampton had indulged his "military ambitions," by accompanying Essex on his expeditions in 1596 and 1597. As to "the romance of his marriage", even if the *Sonnets* had not ceased before 1595 that of itself would have ended them. But, after all, the matter is not even worth debating, for Sir Edmund Chambers' criticism destroys itself as it is being written down. For if "one would expect to find" all these things in

the Sonnets if they were addressed to Southampton, would not one equally "expect to find" similar things in them about the major interests of *Herbert's* life if they were addressed to *him*? It is surprising that Sir Edmund did not apparently see that his objection was double-edged.'

'Well,' said Eugenius, 'if that is the best case they can make out for Herbert, I think Southampton retains the ashes. And, besides, there are all the traditional references to his patronage of and friendship with Shakespeare, of which Herbert has none. And, again, Southampton was, even more notoriously than Pembroke, a lover of the stage and a patron of poets. He was mad on stage plays all his life. Does not someone say of him, as late as the year 1612, that he did nothing but go to see the play every night?'

'Yes. And he was for ever having plays acted—and they were nearly always Shakespeare's plays—at Southampton House. In 1603 he entertained James's Queen Anne with a performance of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and again in 1608 with the same play, and again for two nights in 1605. That play, Shakespeare's earliest and which you suggested to me the other day he probably showed to Southampton as soon as it was written (before 1591), seems to have been a favourite with him."

'Aren't you going to say anything about the Dedication of the Sonnets—"Mr. W. H." and "the onlie begetter"?''

'Only this—that it is best left alone: for, however you take it, it but leads you in a vicious circle. You can argue about it for ever and you will come out of the same door by which you went in. "Mr. W. H." (or "Mr. H. W.") is not the way a noble earl, either of Pembroke or of Southampton, is addressed; therefore it cannot be either Pembroke or Southampton. Does "begetter", then, only mean "procurer", the person who gave Thorpe the copy of the Sonnets to print from? Did our ever-living poet, then, promise eternity to this literary pander? Whichever way you argue it, this precious effusion of T. T. remains continually self-destructive—a mystification. It is quite possible that T. T., who may have had an uneasy conscience, intended it to be so. As it was not Shakespeare's own dedication it is of no real value or

authority. Whatever T. T. said cannot be accepted as evidence about anything. He is a tainted witness. I prefer to leave the "well-wishing adventurer" and his partner in piracy, the "procurer", severely alone.'

'Right you are,' said Eugenius. 'But before you leave the Sonnets altogether I'd like you to tell me what order you think they were written in. It certainly wasn't the order in which Thorpe printed them—the order generally followed and . . .'

'They weren't written in any particular order,' I said. 'Shakespeare wrote them at any odd time when the spirit moved him and kept them in his pockets or made copies of them to show his friends, as Francis Meres said. Then someone got hold of a lot of these copies and took them to Thorpe and he printed them as we see them.'

'That's exactly what I think,' said Eugenius. 'Thorpe no doubt tried to put them in some sort of order or sequence, but it is very jumbled up. I have always thought they could be much better arranged not as to date when written—that doesn't matter a toss—but as to subject and emotion. Have you ever tried to do it, Yorick?'

'No, Eugenius—have you?'

'Why, yes,' said Eugenius, and produced from his pocket, almost shyly, not an envelope this time but a carefully written sheet of paper, and handed it to me. I studied it carefully.

'This looks good, Eugenius,' I said; 'it must have taken you a lot of time and study.'

'It did,' he said simply. 'Do you think, Yorick, you could put it in the book?'

'I certainly will,' I said, 'even if only in the Appendix—but I must study it first.'

'Of course,' said Eugenius, 'and I do hope you'll more or less agree with my re-arrangement. And now, do get on and talk about the title of this chapter that I see you've written down: "*Was Shakespeare ever an Actor?*"' I thought everybody took it for granted he was.'

'Exactly, my dear Eugenius. Everybody has *taken it for granted* and therefore no one has enquired closely into the

evidence. It is time, I think, that somebody did. Most of Shakespeare's biographers bring him to London in 1585 or "the early summer of 1586", and are thus left with what Sir Edmund Chambers calls "a considerable hiatus in his history extending over a maximum of eight years, from 1584 to 1592", before which latter date we have, as he says, with greater caution than the others "no certain evidence of Shakespeare's presence in London". Sir Edmund Chambers will not commit himself to any definite conjecture as to what happened to him or what he did in the hiatus, but waits till we find him writing plays—"probably as far back as 1591 if he is responsible for 2 and 3 *Henry VI*". The others, as I say, are braver. Sir Sidney Lee, for instance, after saying in Chapter iv that "*in the absence of strictly contemporary and categorical information as to how Shakespeare employed his time on arriving at the metropolis much ingenuity has been wasted in irrelevant speculations*", boldly states in Chapter v that "*Shakespeare's earliest reputation was made as an Actor, and although his work as a dramatist soon eclipsed his histrionic fame (sic) he remained a prominent member of the Actors' profession till near the end of his life.*" He adduces no evidence whatever to support the first part of this positive statement, but earlier in the same chapter he has quoted the stock traditions: Davenant's transmitted gossip about his "taking care of gentlemen's horses who came to the Playhouse"; Rowe's vague statement "that he was received into the Company (of the Playhouse) then in being, at first in a very mean state"; and Malone's report of a "Stage Tradition" "that he began as a prompter's assistant or call-boy"—all deriving from the mid-eighteenth century. Lee, however, is satisfied that "*evidence abounds to show that his intellectual capacity and the amiability with which he turned to account his versatile powers were soon recognised and that his promotion to more dignified employment was rapid*", upon which I can only remark that if he came to London, as Sir Sidney says "doubtless" he did, in the summer of 1586, it certainly wasn't rapid, for there is no evidence whatever that he was employed as an actor or in any other capacity at the theatre till we find him writing plays in 1591-2, six years later.



Six years is a long time. Lee begs the question again when he says (p. 54), "*There is little doubt that at an early period Shakespeare joined this eminent company of Actors . . .*" and that "*from 1592 some six years after the dramatist's arrival in London till the close of his professional career, more than twenty years later, such an association is well attested*". Of course, he did join Burbage's Company; of course "such an association is well attested"; but in what capacity did he join it or was so associated? Actor or playwright? The evidence that he joined it, was associated with it, eventually acquired a substantial if not a controlling share in it *as a playwright* is clear and overwhelming. The evidence that he joined it *as an actor* is of the vaguest. And at first, long before the records of his "association" with Burbage and the Lord Chamberlain's Players and his acquiring a share in the company and in the theatre were discovered, it rested *solely* upon the third, fourth, or fifth-hand *eighteenth-century* traditions. In the allusions made to him during his life and in the tributes paid to him by his fellows and contemporaries immediately after his death there is no hint or suggestion whatever (unless you can read one into Greene's outburst) that he was an actor or had gained his first reputation by acting. He is invariably spoken of as a poet and a playwright *and as a poet and a playwright only.*

'Yes—but what about Greene's outburst, "the onely Shake-scene in a countrey"?' asked Eugenius.

'I will come to that presently when I go though all the contemporary allusions, as I propose to do; but first let me emphasise my point that it is *there* that you ought to find evidence of his having acted, if he ever did, and that the fact that you do not (if I establish it) is of itself more than sufficient to discredit local Stratford gossip or vague London traditions of anything from seventy to a hundred and fifty years later.

'When no contemporary records or allusions exist, tradition is valuable and may be accepted. Where they do exist any subsequent tradition which differs from or is not based upon them is not worthy of regard. Tradition must begin at the beginning, just as continuity ought to be continuous.

'I have said that Sir Edmund Chambers is more cautious (and I might add more sensible) than the rest in declining to commit himself to any definite statement as to what Shakespeare was doing between 1585 and 1591, and since it would be manifestly impossible in a single chapter (or, indeed, a whole book) to go through all the myriad imaginings of those who have been less cautious or less wise, I cannot be accused of fearing to meet the issue if I select him as the guide with whom to go through all the allusions and tributes of Shakespeare's *contemporaries* and see what evidence (if any) they provide that the object of their tributes was, at any time, an actor. Sir Edmund himself, in his most admirable Appendix B in Volume II, "Contemporary Allusions", has made the task easy for both of us. We begin with Robert Greene and his letter "to those gentlemen . . . that spend their wits *in making plaies*"; and it happens that of this latter Sir Edmund has already had something to say in Volume I (p. 58). He first quotes the gist of the letter as follows:

Yet trust them not: for there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tyger's hart wrapt in a Player's hide* supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you; and being an absolute *Johannes fac-totum* is, in his owne conceit, the onely Shake-scene in a countrey . . .

and, having then quoted a part of Chettle's apology, he goes on to say on the following page, "However this may be, *Greene's letter in itself is sufficient to show that by September 1592, Shakespeare was both a player and a maker of plays.*"

'Sir Edmund has now, therefore, abandoned his caution and is content to be assured, on the evidence of that sole angry outburst of a rival playwright, that Shakespeare was an actor as well as a maker of plays. I cannot see that the evidence is good enough to convince anyone who was not already predisposed to be so convinced. The fact is that everybody (including even so level-headed a man as Chambers) is so subconsciously influenced by the fact that Rowe, his first biographer, accepted him (on hearsay) as an actor

(albeit a very poor one) that they too are prepared so to accept him and to consider as corroborative evidence any loose statement which, but for that preconception, they would have paid no serious attention to.

'For what do Greene's words amount to? The upstart crow "beautified with our feathers" is a writer who stole their thunder, and he who supposes he is "as well able to bombast out a blanke verse as the best of you" is a man who *writes* blank verse, not a man who declaims it; for they did not declaim their own verse.

'"*Tyger's hart wrapt in a Player's hyde*" is a parody of Shakespeare's line in *3 Henry VI* (Act 1, Sc. 4), spoken by the Duke of York to Queen Margaret: "O tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hidel" It is, it must be admitted, a somewhat bombastic line and Greene seized upon it as apt for parody and ridicule. But does the parody mean that Shakespeare was the "Player"? By no means. It means only that the *line parodied* was Shakespeare's. "That with *his* Tyger's hart," etc.: that is to say his bombastic line quoted above. It *was* his line. He *did* write it. Does the parody imply that he *acted* it? As I understand language I should say that it most certainly does not. Someone, some player, acted it no doubt. Does Sir Edmund Chambers suggest—does anybody suggest—that Shakespeare acted the Duke of York in the production of *3 Henry VI* on the 3rd March, 1592? Or that Greene had seen it acted? Or that he knew who did act York?

'If Greene's splenetic outburst is the best evidence to be had that Shakespeare was an actor (as well as a playwright) in September 1592, I know no court that would not dismiss the case.'

'Why don't they say that "the onely Shake-scene in a countrey" shows clearly that he was a scene-shifter? I dare say he was, when he was hanging about trying to get them to take his plays,' said Eugenius.

'They might just as reasonably have said so,' I agreed, 'but I must get on.

'After Greene comes Chettle with his apology. This too has been taken by some (but not by Chambers) as further

evidence that Shakespeare was then an actor and well esteemed in that profession. Yet all that Chettle says, after expressing his regret that when preparing Greene's *Groate's-worth of Wit* for the press he had not modified the invective, is this:

. . . that I did not, I am as sory as if the originall fault had been my fault, because myselfe have seene his (Shakespeare's) demeanor no less civill than he excelent in the qualitie he professes; Besides, divers of worship have reported his uprightness of dealing . . . and his facetious grace in writing, that aprooves his Art.

'Upon this Sir Sidney Lee in his *Life* (Chapter VI, p. 86) says: "*The Publisher Chettle wrote in 1592, that Shakespeare was 'excelent in the qualitie he professes'*," and actually adds this footnote: "Quality, in Elizabethan English, was the technical term for the Actor's profession"!

'I am afraid I can only meet this extraordinary *ipse dixit* with a flat denial. "Quality" may have been used to describe the actor's profession, but it was used equally to describe any other profession, state, condition, or virtue—from kingship or writing plays, to mercy—which Shakespeare tells us is not strained. Having made this note, Lee goes on to remind us that "the old actor Wm. Beeston (per Aubrey) asserted, in the next century, that Shakespeare "did act exceeding well" and finally concludes (p. 37): "*But the roles in which he distinguished himself are imperfectly recorded*", and that "*Few surviving documents refer specifically to performances by him*"—remarks which are as extreme examples of meiosis as I have ever come across, when I consider that his roles are not recorded at all and that even the loose traditions affirm that he never distinguished himself in any.

'In the Appendix of "Contemporary Allusions" there follow Chettle, Thomas Edwardes (1593?), R. B. (1594), W. Har. (1594), and Henry Willobie (1594). By all of these Shakespeare is referred to as a poet only; though the theme of Henry Willobie's effusion invited a reference to Shakespeare as a comedian if he actually had been one.

'Then comes Michael Drayton (1594-1627). The lines are written, apparently, not long after Shakespeare's death:

. . . and be it said of thee  
*Shakespeare*, thou had'st as smooth a Comicke vaine,  
 Fitting the socke, and in thy naturall braine,  
 As strong conception, and as cleere a rage,  
 As any one that trafiqued with the stage.

Here again was an opportunity of saying that Shakespeare had other "traffic with the stage" besides that of writing plays—if he had.

'Then follow William Covell (1595), Francis Meres, whom we have seen once or twice already (1598), Richard Barnefield (1598), praising Shakespeare's *Venus* and *Lucrece* and promising him immortality through them, and John Marston (1598), who writes:

*Luscus*, what's play'd today? faith now I know  
 I see thy lips abroach, from whence doth flow  
 Naught but pure *Juliet* and *Romeo*.  
 Say, who acts best? *Drusus* or *Roscio*?  
 Now I have him, that nere of aught did speak  
 But when of plaies or Plaiers he did treat  
 H'ath made a common-place book out of plaies,  
 And speaks in print: at least what ere he says  
 Is warranted by Curtaine plaudeties.

That is to say Marston's friend *Luscus* is a theatre-fan and mad on plays (particularly *Romeo and Juliet*), which he goes to see at the Curtain theatre, and what *he* doesn't know about actors isn't knowledge. If he had ever seen Shakespeare act, as well as write, *Romeo and Juliet*, we ought to have heard of it.

'The next to bear testimony to Shakespeare as a poet are Gabriel Harvey (1598), John Weever (1599), and the anonymous author of *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* and *The Returne from Parnassus*, Parts I and II. Part II was acted at St. John's College, Cambridge, probably at the Christmases of 1598, 1599, and 1601, by which time, of course, Shakespeare had acquired full standing in and part ownership of Burbage's Company and theatre.

'On this question of Shakespeare's acting it is worth close examination, because some of the members of the company in their proper persons are the characters of the play. It would be too long to quote here all the references in it to Shakespeare, for it is full of them, but the following sample seems to me to show clearly that Shakespeare was (at that date, at any rate, whatever he may have been before) a fellow of their company certainly, but their fellow who wrote for them—their pet, private playwright and *not* their fellow-actor. It is spoken by Kempe, their chief comedian, and Burbage, their chief tragedian—

KEMPE Few of the university men pen plaies well, they smell too much of that writer *Ouid* and that writer *Metamorphosis*, and talk too much of *Proserpina* and *Iuppiter*. Why here's our fellow Shakespeare puts them all downe, I and *Ben Ionson* too. . . .

BURBAGE It's a shrewd fellow indeed: . . .

'I see no reason to suppose that *that* had not always been Shakespeare's association with the company, and from the very beginning.

'And now we come to Ben Jonson. He has written so much, in praise or in criticism, of Shakespeare (but mostly in praise) that he also is too long to quote here at all fully. There is nothing whatever in anything he wrote to suggest that Shakespeare was ever an actor. It is true that Sir Edmund Chambers, when quoting his lines against actors (added to the first Folio) which begin

Now for the Players, it is true, I taxed 'hem,  
And yet but some; . . .

says that Shakespeare may be one of the "better natures" referred to in the concluding lines:

Onely amongst them, I am sorry for  
Some better natures, by the rest so drawne,  
To run in that vile line.

'The suggestion is purely wanton and derives from that unfortunate preconception in his (and everybody's) mind

that Shakespeare *was* an actor. But for that preconception it could never have occurred to him.

'No poet—not Milton nor Shelley nor Arnold nor Tennyson—has ever given to another more perfect or more convincingly sincere praise than Ben Jonson gives to Shakespeare in his panegyric "To the memory of my beloved" in the preliminary leaves of the First Folio. It is praise of a poet, a playwright, a genius superior to all others (himself included), and is, as it were, wrung from him in spite of their differences.

'I cannot bring myself to believe that Ben Jonson, the scholar, the classic—the man who ruled, as he thought fit, the universal monarchy of wit—who disliked and despised actors, would ever have admitted Shakespeare to equal and familiar converse and association with himself during life or paid him so tremendous a tribute after death if he had been of that (to Jonson) contemptibly inferior profession. It was bad enough that he wrote plays which, running counter to all his own principles, yet achieved greater success. He would not have said of him "I loved the man, and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any". Or do you think that the caustic and intolerant Ben, when he was criticising Shakespeare, as he often did, would have refrained from a gibe at his other, meaner profession if Shakespeare had ever embraced it?

'So the Roll of Honour, paying tribute to Shakespeare, goes on with John Bodenham (1600), John Davies of Hereford (1603–10), Anthony Scholoker (1604), William Barksted (1607), John Webster (1612), Thomas Heywood (1622), Richard Carew (1614), Thomas Freeman (1614), Francis Beaumont (1615), William Basse (1620), John Taylor (1620), Hugh Holland (1623), Leonard Digges (1623, 1640), and many anonymous contemporary admirers, to John Milton (1630), with his "Epitaph on the Admirable Dramaticke Poet W. Shakespeare" beginning: "What needs my *Shakespeare* for his honoured Bones" (Sir Edmund Chambers omits for some reason the allusion in *L'Allegro*).

'Now, in none of all these tributes, save one, is there any allusion to Shakespeare's acting. That one exception is John

Davies of Hereford. In a marginal note to his *Microcosmos* (1603) and a similar note to his *Civil Warres of Death and Fortune* (1605) against passages referring to stage players there is written "W.S.", "R.B.", which initials may be taken to represent William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage. I do not know if the marginal notes are in Davies's own handwriting or by somebody else, but, in any case, the meaning of the verses themselves against which they are written is (to me) obscure. John Davies, however, has something more definite for me to meet. It is from his *Scourge of Folly* (1610), and is this:

To our English Terence, Mr. Will. Shakespeare

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Some say (good Will) which I, in sport, do sing,  
 Had'st thou not plaid some Kingly parts in sport,  
 Thou had'st bin a companion for a *King*:  
 And, beene a King among the meaner sort.  
 Some others raile; but, raile as they thinke fit,  
 Thou hast no rayling, but, a raigning Wit:  
*And Honesty thou sow'st, which they do reape;*  
*So, to increase their Stocke which they do keepe.*

'Here, again, I find the meaning somewhat obscure. Sir Edmund confesses that he once had the idea that there might have been some talk of making Shakespeare, and perhaps Burbage, Companions of the Bath, but abandoned it on discovering that there were no "Companions" of the Bath in those days. Whatever it means, however, it does say definitely that Shakespeare had "played some Kingly parts in sport".

'That *might* mean that he had done some amateur acting; or that he had on occasion stepped in out of good-nature to fill a part when the company was short or someone did not turn up. That is, I rather think myself, about the extent of his acting; and, if that were so, would support my view that he was never a professional actor. What the last two lines exactly mean I cannot say, but they suggest that John Davies was a gardener, with his metaphor of sowing Honesty and seeing Stocks come up, and I *could* interpret it as meaning



that Shakespeare sowed and his fellows reaped; that is, he wrote the plays and they took the larger share of the profits. Which, again, would emphasise the fact that he was not an actor and only took author's share.

'I shall have occasion to refer to these lines of Davies' again when I am dealing with what Sir Edmund Chambers calls "Actors' Lists" but which I think should be more properly called "Company Lists" or "Sharers' Lists".'

Eugenius, who, I had been flattered to see, had been keeping wide awake and had been following my rather boring disquisition with apparent interest, now sat up and asked, 'Am I on the Bench, Yorick?'

'Why, yes,' I said, 'if you like to be; or you can be *Advocatus diaboli* if you prefer it—or both. I particularly want you to preserve a judicial or even a hostile mind while I am going through the evidence, and at the end you can sum up and deliver judgement.'

'Very well, Mr.—ah—Yorick,' said Eugenius, peering at me, as it were, over the top of non-existent spectacles. 'I may tell you that the court is with you, so far as the evidence has gone, that the man—ah—Shakespeare, does not seem to have been an actor for any long time or to have been of any repute as such at any time. But now, as regards these Actors' Lists, you will be in some difficulty there, I think. Proceed, Mr. Yorick.'

'I think not, m'lud, if they are looked at dispassionately and without preconceived opinion. It is established that my client, William Shakespeare, was in London writing plays in the year 1591-2. Part 1 of the play of *Henry VI* was produced by Alleyn's Company on the 3rd March, 1592. It seems to have been at once very popular, for it was acted again on the 7th, 11th, 16th, and 28th March; on the 5th, 13th, and 21st April; on the 4th, 7th, 14th, 19th, and 25th May; and on the 12th and 19th June of that year (1592), and a total sum of £32 8s. 0d. was paid to the Company of Lord Strange's men, who were Alleyn's Company. There has never been a suggestion anywhere by anyone that my client acted in this play or that he was ever a member of Alleyn's Company, but it is to be presumed that he received payment for his play,

and that such payment took the form of a proportion of the payment made to Alleyn for each performance. (These payments, it may be noted, varied from £3 16s. 8d. to £1 2s. 0d.)'

'It seems a reasonable assumption, Mr. Yorick. The man had to live.'

'So far as is known, my lord, so far, I mean, as any evidence of the period exists, it was his *only* source of living. He certainly could not have lived by acting Adam in *As You Like It* or as the Ghost in *Hamlet*. I resume. The play *I Henry VI* was acted again by the same company on the 16th and 31st January, 1592.

'Now, at this time, my lord, William Shakespeare was what we should call a free-lance. He was not attached to any company. He took his plays to whoever would play them—the managers or producers of the Lord Chamberlain's or the Lord Admiral's Players or wherever he could get his foot in. His ambitions were (as I hardly need remind your lordship) purely literary. He had already written, though he had not yet succeeded in getting published, two poems—*Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*. But he knew also that he could never hope to live, much less to send money to his family in Stratford-on-Avon, by writing poetry. If his literary ambitions, if the genius he felt stirring within him was to be turned to account—to such account that might make its continual expression possible—stage plays were his only chance. He had felt it in him that he could write them, but, having written them, there yet remained the problem—a more difficult one to him than the writing—of getting them acted.

'You have already heard, my lord, that he had—it is not known exactly when, but some time before this year of 1591–2—obtained the friendship or at least the patronage of the young Earl of Southampton. He had, I suggest to your lordship, shown to his friend and patron earlier plays that he had written, *Love's Labour's Lost* and perhaps *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and had been encouraged to continue. That young noble was, as is well known, a great amateur of stage plays and a great frequenter of the theatre. He would

certainly be acquainted with the leaders of the various companies who produced and acted plays for the Lord Chamberlain, the Lord Admiral, and other patrons of the drama. He would have brought his protégé to see them or have given him letters to them asking them to read his plays. Without some such introduction, without some such patronage it is more than difficult, it is almost impossible to suppose that my client, a young, completely unknown provincial from Stratford-on-Avon, with no connections in the literary world, could have got his first plays accepted.

‘I suggest that *with* such introductions Shakespeare besieged the doors of The Rose and The Curtain and The Globe and pestered Alleyn and Henslowe and Burbage and the rest of them to read his plays. *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, though it had pleased its author and the young earl, did not appeal to *them*. They told him that what their audiences liked best to see were plays of action: of battle, murder, and sudden death; and Alleyn, or one of them, suggested the life and troublous reign of Henry VI as a good theme for a play of that sort. At any rate Shakespeare wrote and Alleyn accepted and put on the stage *I Henry VI* and it was an immediate and outstanding success. The list from which I took those fifteen performances in March to June 1592 shows that it was acted nearly twice as often as any other play in the list, which includes Marlowe’s bloody and popular *Jew of Malta*.’

‘This is all very interesting, Mr. Yorick; but it is not evidence. I suppose you have some purpose in setting it out, but when are you coming to the “Actors’ Lists”?’

‘At once, m’lud. I am only putting before you the position of the young Shakespeare at the time when his first play was produced in London. He was not then an actor. He was not a member of Alleyn’s or anyone else’s company. He was a free-lance poet and would-be dramatist, with his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder—not of the stage but of Parnassus. There is no reason why he should become an actor, unless it is suggested he did so to curry favour with Alleyn and Burbage to induce them to accept his plays. But the favour would have been the other way about. They did

not want for actors, any more than theatre managers do now or have done at any time. And nothing, I imagine, could worsen the chance of a young man applying for a small part more than the production of a manuscript play followed by a request to the manager to read it. I only want to see that your lordship's mind is not abused with the idea (which everybody seems to have adopted) that because a man has had relations with the stage for the better part of his life he must therefore have been an actor.'

'Go on, Mr. Yorick. I am not Sir Sidney Lee—nor even Sir Edmund Chambers. I have an absolutely open mind.'

'Shakespeare did not acquire a share in the Globe Theatre and become a "Householder" till 1594, when he purchased a fifth of a half share with Phillips, Pope, Heminge, and Kempe. But before that date he had already written, besides *1 Henry VI*, 2 and 3 *Henry VI*, and *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*; and he had *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* in his pocket to be produced when he had achieved sufficient status. There is no record of any of these having been acted, except *Henry VI* (Greene's outburst) and *Titus Andronicus*, before the end of 1594, but some of them probably were. *In any case, there is no suggestion that he ever acted in any of them.* There is no proof that he was yet a member of *any* company. Sir Edmund Chambers says (Vol. 1, p. 60):

After Greene's outburst of 1592 Shakespeare's position becomes shadowy again, up to the re-grouping of the Companies in 1594. We certainly cannot have any assurance that he was with Alleyn's Company. He is not named in the Warrant of 6 May 1593, *which probably gives only sharers*, or in Alleyn's correspondence. He may have been with Pembroke's, . . . or with the Admiral; or even with Sussex's. *Or he may, for a time, have dropped acting* and become an unattached Playwright.

Why need he have been with any company as "actor"? Why speak of his having "dropped acting" when there is no evidence that he ever took it up? Why could he not *always* have been an "unattached playwright" till Burbage and Henslowe secured him?

'After he had acquired his one-tenth share in The Globe he at once became a member of that company and *for the first time his name appears in the lists of Payees*. The members of that new company (formed after old Burbage's death) were, as Sir Edmund says (Vol. 1, p. 64):

William Kempe, Thomas Pope, John Heminge, Augustine Phillips and George Bryan. It also included William Shakespeare and Richard Burbadge, who became its leading actor. Its history, first as the Chamberlain's Men and then as the King's Men, is continuous throughout Shakespeare's career, and there is nothing to show that he ever wrote for any other Company.

'I entirely agree. He did not. Richard Burbage and William Kempe and John Heminge (who were pretty good judges of plays) had captured him. They had been making overtures ever since 1592, but did not definitely secure him till the new company was formed. Whether they gave him his one-tenth share in the new theatre to secure him or whether he bought it with his savings or (more likely) with money Southampton gave him I do not know, but secure him they did, and henceforth he was *their* playwright and wrote an average of nearly two plays a year for them up to 1610. *From that date (1594), but never before*, his name appears, as you would expect, in what everybody persists in calling "Actors' Lists". They are nothing of the sort, as they show on the face of them; they are merely the names of the members of the company who received payment, on behalf of the rest of the company and anyone else entitled to share, for the performances given. More often than not John Heminge alone was the immediate payee and received and afterwards distributed the money among those entitled, in their several capacities, to share it. These were many and were by no means only the actors, who did not probably receive the lion's share.

'Sir Edmund Chambers says (Vol. 1, p. 81): "*A distinction must be drawn amongst the sharers themselves. Some were 'Housekeepers', having acquired an ownership in the Globe or the Blackfriars or of both houses. One of these was Shakespeare.*" Yes, and he was author too. He would share as author as

well as housekeeper, and his share as author would, I submit, be commensurate with his value to the company in that capacity. And therefore when, as Sir Edmund also says (p. 62), "*At any rate Shakespeare comes before us on the 15th March, 1595, with an assured theatrical status as a Payee, on behalf of the Chamberlain's men, for plays given at Court in the Winter of 1594 and therefore doubled a sharer in the Company*", it in no way implies (much less proves) that he was, as Sir Edmund has previously stated, "*both a player and a maker of plays*".

'It shows simply that he was a *sharer*.

'Here is the entry referred to (from *The Elizabethan Stage*, Vol. iv, p. 142):

1594. *Court (Greenwich)*

Dec. 26. 27. William Kempe, William Shakespeare and Richard Burbage servantes to the Lord Chamberlayne.

"... servantes to the Lord Chamberlayne", that is to say members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company, and not a list of the actors in that play (which was apparently *The Comedy of Errors*, written in 1592-3, and the cast of which requires fifteen actors), but the three principal members of the company appointed *as payees* of the Court emolument.

'All the entries are of the same kind right down to 1616, and for the most part the payments are to Heminge alone. Take, for instance:

1602-3. *Court.*

(*From Chamber Account*)

Dec. 26. (Whitehall) Feb. 2. Richmond. John Hemynges and the rest of his Companie servantes to the Lord Chamberlayne.

Or this:

1614-15. *Court (Whitehall)*

To John Hemynges uppon the Lord Chamberlayne's Warrant dated XIX Maii 1615, in the behalf of himself and his fellowes the King's Maiesties Players for eighte severall plaies before his Maiestie. . . .

'But where are your "Actors' Lists", Mr. Yorick?'

'I do not know, my lord, unless these be they. The only "lists" I know in which Shakespeare was, inferentially, described as an actor are contained in the First Folio editions of Ben Jonson's works and of Shakespeare's works respectively. I will hand them up to your lordship. Here is the list in the First Folio of Shakespeare (published, as your lordship is aware, by Heminge and Condell in 1623), as printed in Sir Edmund Chambers's book, Vol. II, p. 77:

(1623. From ninth preliminary leaf to F.1.)

The names of the Principall Actors in all these Playes.

William Shakespeare	Samuel Gilburne
Richard Burbadge	Robert Armin
John Hemmings	William Ostler
Augustine Phillips	Nathan Field
William Kempe	John Underwood
Thomas Poope	Nicholas Tooley
George Bryan	William Ecclestone
Henry Condell	Joseph Taylor
William Slye	Robert Benfield
Richard Cowly	Robert Goughe
John Lowine	Richard Robinson
Samuel Crosse	John Shancke
Alexander Cooke	John Rice

The heading says that these are the names of the principal actors in all these plays; but I submit, with confidence, that they are, in fact, the names of the principal members of the company of which Shakespeare was a member, and an important, if not the most important, member in his quality of playwright to the company.

'Seven years after his death this First Folio of his complete works was published in order to preserve them and to do honour to his name, not as an actor of any parts in them, but as the author of them all. I submit that the word "actor" cannot, in the absence of any other evidence, be taken to mean that he ever acted in any one of them. Whoever prepared the First Folio for the press was given a list of the principal members of the company and printed it. To do honour to his name William Shakespeare was

put first, even before that of Richard Burbage, their chief actor. He had been for a long time, even in his life, considered and treated as of equal importance and value to the company as playwright as Burbage was as actor. Why else but to honour him *as author* is his name put first? Is it suggested that he was commensurate with Burbage or with Kempe *as an actor*? Even those who assume, without thinking, that he ever acted at all, agree that he never acted any but small parts and that he had ceased acting as soon as, or soon after, his plays achieved success. No one has ever dreamed of suggesting that he acted "in all these Playes". If the heading is incorrect in that statement, as it clearly is, why must the word "Actors" be taken literally?

'I submit, my lord, that this ninth preliminary leaf to the First Folio is no evidence that Shakespeare ever acted in any of his own plays—or at all.

'There remain the two cases in which, at first sight, it would appear that Shakespeare acted in two of Ben Jonson's plays. Here is how they are set out in Sir Edmund Chambers's book (Vol. II, p. 71):

VIII. *Shakespeare and His Fellows*

(1598, before 20 Sept. Note after text of *Every Man in his Humour* in First Folio of Ben Jonson's *Workes* (1616). A contemporary letter shows that E.M.I. was 'a new play' shortly before 20 Sep. (*Eliz. Stage*, III, 359).

This Comoedie was first Acted, in the yeere 1598. By the then L. Chamberlayne his Servants. The principall Comoedians were:

Will Shakespeare	Ric. Burbadge
Aug. Phillips	Iohn Hemings
Hen. Condel	Tho. Pope
Will Slye	Chr. Beeston
Will Kempe	Ion Duke

At first sight it looks as if this was a contemporary note—a note made in 1598, when the play was first acted. But when you look at it again you see that it was not—that it is a note printed in the First Folio of Ben Jonson's *Works* published in 1616, eighteen years later.



'The second entry is similar:

(1603, c. Christmas. Note after text in *Sejanus* in First Folio of Ben Jonson's *Workes* (1616). On the date, cf. *Eliz. Stage*, III, 367).

This Tragedie was first acted in the yeere 1603. By the King's Maiesties Servants. The Principall Tragedians were,

Ric. Burbadge	Will Shakespeare
Aug. Philips	John Hemings
Will Sly	Hen. Condel
John Lowrie	Alex. Cooke.

These notes in the First Folio of Ben Jonson's *Works*, published in 1616, are not, I submit, certain evidence that Shakespeare acted in either play. I should not, myself, call them "Actors' Lists" at all. They are not like a programme or bill of the play. The names set out are the names of the principal members of the company that produced and acted them, and Shakespeare's name had long been bracketed with that of Richard Burbage as the two chief members of that company. The notes are, however, I admit, stronger evidence of his having acted than is the note to the First Folio of his own works published in 1638, and it may be that in compliment to Ben Jonson Shakespeare took a part in the first production by his company of these two plays. Except that there are no kings in *Every Man in His Humour* they might explain John Davies' "Had'st thou not plaid some Kingly parts in sport". To have taken a part in a first production in compliment to a friend or to have acted a kingly part in sport does not, however, prove a man to have been an actor, and these three places are the only more or less contemporary records or even incidental references to his having acted, and only one of these, that of John Davies, was set down while he was yet alive.

'As Sir Edmund Chambers himself says (Vol. I, p. 83):

As to Shakespeare's own acting, we have little to go upon, except late and rather conflicting hints through stage tradition. "He did act exceeding well", says Aubrey. But Rowe got the impression that he was no "extraordinary" actor and that the top of his performance was the ghost in his own *Hamlet*. A story, dubious in its details, describes him as playing the very minor part of Adam in *As You Like It*.

On these three pillars the whole acceptance of Shakespeare as an actor rested for two hundred and fifty years! The first comes from the egregious Aubrey seventy years after his death and is no more worthy of belief than his calf-killing story. The second (Rowe) is a hundred years after his death and the third (Oldys) nearly a hundred and fifty, and as reported by Oldys rests on the testimony of "one of Shakespeare's younger brothers", who if he was Gilbert had been buried in Stratford churchyard in February 1612, and who in any case, if alive, must have been nearly a hundred years old. I should not myself dignify any of these three pieces of gossip with the term "stage-tradition". *And those are all that there are.* A flimsy foundation for the tradition that Shakespeare was an actor.

'Finally there is the "internal evidence" to be derived from the plays themselves. Sir Edmund Chambers says (Vol. I, p. 84): "We may gather from *Richard III* and again from *Hamlet* that he was interested in the technique of his profession", thus assuming, as usual, that his "profession" was that of an actor. Most certainly he was interested in the technique of acting. But is not an author interested in the technique of the acting of his plays? Is he not even more jealous of exact meanings and nice inflections and avoidance of exaggeration and bombast than any actor could be or certainly ever is? Who is it that objects to "gags", the actor or the author? Who is offended to the soul to hear a passion torn to tatters? Or would have an actor whipped for out-doing termagant or out-Heroding Herod?

'The speech of Hamlet to the Players (Act III, Sc. 2) is not the speech of an actor; it is the speech of an author whose withers have been wrung by hearing his lines mouthed and bellowed out of all sense; the speech of an *author-producer* (for such, I take it, he often was with his own plays) who has often danced with impatience to see the modesty of nature so continually overstepped and the actors' parts so overdone.

'Whenever I read it it carries to my mind the strongest confirmatory proof that Shakespeare was no actor, but rather that he had suffered acutely from actors; and that it had often

needed all his gentle nature to keep his temper at rehearsals and not too greatly to offend Burbage when he was disposed to over-rant a little or Kempe when he wanted to gag in the Clown parts.

'Who but an author or an author-producer would have written:

O, reform it altogether. And let those that play your clowns speak no more than is set down for them: for there be of them that will themselves laugh, to set on some quantity of barren spectators to laugh too; . . .

and the rest of it? It is an author's *cri de cœur*.'

'Have you nearly finished, Mr. Yorick?' asked Eugenius, looking at the clock.

'I have only to restate shortly, my lord, my case and that of my opponents. They say—the "stage tradition", based on the scanty evidence your lordship has seen, says that Shakespeare came to London early in 1586 and thereafter, for five or six years (till he is found having written 1 and 3 *Henry VI*), he gained a precarious existence by holding horses' heads at some unspecified theatre doors and/or by acting small parts inside it. They produce no contemporary evidence. And it is perfectly certain that if parts like Adam or the Ghost were the extent of his powers, he could not have lived on *that*.

'I say that, whenever it was he did come to London, he came with a view to authorship and not with a view to acting: that he early made friends with or obtained the friendly patronage of the young Southampton and lived on his bounty (with occasional quarrels and estrangements) until in 1591–2 he got his Part 1 of *Henry VI*, and very soon after his Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, accepted and acted. Part 1 was, as I have shown, an immediate and really astounding success. Parts 2 and 3 probably were the same. Parts 1 and 3 are alluded to by two of the leading writers of the day—the one with approval by Nashe and the other with anger by Greene. From that moment the theatre managers who had held him off or sniffed at his plays were all agog to secure him. Before Burbage secured him in 1594 he

had already written half a dozen more plays. All these he brought to Burbage's company, of which he became a member, and besides his share of the takings as one of the Housekeepers, he received (and I suggest continued to receive for the rest of his life) a substantial share as author. He may have helped to produce his plays when first acted. I think he probably did, and his remarks in *Hamlet* are evidence of his feelings. But he would have had no need to *act* in them and (which is even more certain) no *time* to do so: because, thereafter, he was supplying his company with an average of nearly two new plays a year. No man could do that *and* produce them *and* act every night as well.

'Why is it necessary to suppose that he ever acted at all? Nearly everybody agrees that he "gave up acting" when he succeeded as a playwright—but on the strength of those three flimsy "traditions" they begin by assuming that he was first an actor. Sir Edmund Chambers says (Vol. 1, p. 72): "*Shakespeare's success as a Playwright appears to have terminated all other literary ambitions*". He might have left out the word "literary", for all the more certainly would it have terminated any lesser ones. He says again (Vol. II, p. 70):

But Shakespeare not improbably gave up acting at an early date, and I think we must assume that, if he continued to be an Actor-sharer, his plays were thereafter his contribution to the enterprise and did not bring him any additional remuneration.

'I ask your lordship to consider that sentence as an extreme example of the influence of a preconception. Why actor-sharer at all? There is no proof that he was ever an *actor*-sharer, only that he was a sharer. And how, after he had ceased to act, could he have "continued to be an *Actor*-sharer"? And why must his plays be "thereafter" his sole "contribution to the enterprise"? Why may they not *always* have been his sole contribution—from the moment he joined the company? And why must they not bring him any "*additional* remuneration"? Observe the assumption throughout: "I assume Shakespeare was an actor. I assume whatever share he took (besides his Housekeeper's share)

was for acting. I assume that though he ceased acting quite soon, he went on taking his actor's share. So much so that though his plays were thereafter his sole contribution he got no 'additional' remuneration for them."

'Is it not both simpler and more likely to suppose that the plays were *always* what he got money for? That he was author-sharer always and never actor-sharer? For even if he had acted petty parts before, how could his "share" have been more than trifling? How could he have lived on it? How could it have equalled Burbage's, as it apparently did?

'It must have been for his plays and not for his acting that he was bracketed with Burbage as the chief men of the company.

'I put in a statement by the Rev. John Ward, Vicar of Stratford in the years 1661-3, a more credible witness than Aubrey, in corroboration. It is more nearly contemporary than any of the legendary stories. This is what he says:

I have heard y<sup>t</sup> Mr. Shakespeare was a natural wit, without any art at all; hee frequented ye plays all his younger time, but in his elder days lived at Stratford: and supplied ye stage with 2 plays every year, and for y<sup>t</sup> had an allowance so large, y<sup>t</sup> hee spent att ye Rate of 1,000 a year, as I have heard.

Fifty years after Shakespeare's death the "stage-legend" of his having been an actor had not apparently yet been born. He was only playwright.

'I submit, my lord, that there is no evidence sufficient to show that my client ever acted.'

'I find,' said Eugenius, 'for the Defendant, with costs on the higher scale. The gossip of the person Aubrey, the testimony of a centenarian brother (long buried), and the legend of Shakespeare in the part of old Truepenny do not constitute evidence such as would be accepted by this court—or by any court of law anywhere, unless it might be on the Island of Laputa. As to what have been, somewhat loosely in my opinion, called "Actors' Lists", they are, to some extent, evidence that the defendant Shakespeare acted at some time or times, notably on the occasions of the

first production of two of his friend—ah—Ben Jonson's plays. But they are not conclusive evidence, and the terms "Comedians" and "Tragedians", occurring not in a play-bill but in a printed edition, may mean no more—as learned counsel has suggested—than that the names were those of the chief members of the company of players of which the defendant was a prominent one in his capacity of playwright to the company.

'It being now past midnight the court will rise and adjourn for refreshment of which it has been much in need for a long time. It generally is past midnight when you get going, Yorick,' concluded Eugenius, as he got up and shook himself. 'Brevity is not the soul of *your* wit.'

'I had not thought it was so late,' I said. 'I'm sorry. I will brew some coffee and we will reward ourselves with old Armagnac brandy. I must have foreseen that this would be a late symposium, for both are at hand.'

When the coffee was made—and I make coffee according to the simple recipe of M. Boulestin—and Eugenius was a little restored by the Armagnac brandy, 'We must go for a walk to-morrow, Yorick,' he said, 'or rather to-day—for it is Sunday morning—and get the cobwebs out of our heads by looking for the spring.'

'It's here,' I said; 'the last week has done wonders. The crocuses are out and there are sheets of snowdrops. The frost is out of the ground. I have planted broad beans and parsnips and spinach. The thrushes are singing their full song, and they and all the birds have mated. The hazel catkins are shaking gold dust to the wind. I saw lambs in a field yesterday.'

'Sing, cuckoo!' said Eugenius.

'No cuckoo for six weeks yet, Eugenius. But certainly a walk to-morrow—I mean to-day—after breakfast. You deserve it, for you've been very patient. I only hope our readers will be as good. The next chapter will have to be a sticky one, too, I'm afraid. I can't give you your head again for some time.'

'What's it going to be about?'

'Authenticity and Private Judgement. But, look here, if

I'm going to early Mass I'd better go to bed,' and I got up and went to put the Armagnac away.

'Orthodoxy is my doxy,' said Eugenius.

'And hey the doxy over the dale!' I heard someone say as I got up from stooping at the wine cupboard.

'Did you say that?' I asked.

'No, I was just going to, though. Didn't you?'

'No. I was just going to, too. But I didn't.'

'I believe your house is haunted,' said Eugenius.

It was one o'clock on Sunday morning, the 9th March, when we went to bed.

## Chapter VII

### AUTHENTICITY AND PRIVATE JUDGEMENT

*Costard: O, they have lived long on the alms-basket of words.*

LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST, ACT V, SC. I

*For most men in a brazen prison live,  
Where, in the sun's hot eye,  
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly  
Their lives to some unmeaning task work give,  
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison-wall.  
And as, year after year,  
Fresh products of their barren labour fall  
From their tired hands, and rest  
Never yet comes more near,  
Gloom settles slowly down over their breast;  
And while they strive to stem  
The waves of mournful thought by which they are pressed,  
Death in their prison reaches them,  
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.*

A SUMMER NIGHT

'You must have worked hard since we came in from our walk, to get all this written out,' said Eugenius that same Sunday evening, as he turned the last leaf of the previous chapter and threw the manuscript on the table. 'And you seem to have been at great pains to prove that Shakespeare was never an actor. Do you dislike actors, Yorick?'

'By no means. I haven't even got an Imperfect Sympathy with them, though I agree with all that Charles Lamb has said about the acting of his plays. It is, simply, that I cannot somehow see Shakespeare as an actor, and that the assumption that he was one does not seem to me to be justified.'

'You always do agree with Lamb.'

'He is the best Shakespearean critic we have had—till



you come to Walter Raleigh or Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, anyway.'

'Because he always agrees with you!'

'If you like. Could you suggest a better reason?'

'Well, I can't agree with him when he says "*that Shakespeare's Plays are less calculated for performance on a Stage than those of any other dramatist whatsoever*". That is going too far.'

'He admits it a paradox. But don't forget that he adds that "*their very excellence is a reason that they should be so. There is so much in them,*" he says, "*which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do.*" Tell me, Eugenius, do you think that anyone—anyone, I mean, who had first read his Shakespeare with eye and mind in the quiet of his own house, and who thus already knew and loved him—do you think that such a one when he first saw a play of Shakespeare on the stage was ever satisfied? Were you? Was he not, were *you* not, rather, if not disgusted or horrified, at least hurt and disappointed? I know I was. Did you not feel that something had been left out? That the finer parts of Shakespeare, his more intimate meanings, were not there? That somehow he had been, I won't say coarsened, but deflowered—made common? That he was become dry bread instead of bread-and-honey? In short, that something was wanting?'

'Not quite like that; but I know what you mean,' admitted Eugenius. 'On the other hand, some of his plays I have liked better on the stage than in the study. *Much Ado about Nothing*, for instance, and *The Taming of the Shrew*.'

'I agree,' I said, 'as to both. I remember I first saw *Much Ado* with Irving and Ellen Terry as Benedick and Beatrice; and, contrary to opinion, I thought Irving an admirable Benedick; and she, of course, an ideal Beatrice. But the rest of the cast . . .! And in the *Shrew*, Ada Rehan was Katharine—and superb. Drew was a good Petruchio, but the rest spoke with a strong American accent. Grumio with an American accent was almost funny.'

'It would be no worse than Cockney,' said Eugenius.

'I didn't say it would.'

'Oh, well,' conceded Eugenius, 'I expect Shakespeare

himself had a Warwickshire accent. When he first came to London, anyway. Perhaps that's why he only got small parts—I mean, of course, Yorick, if he ever did act,' added Eugenius hurriedly. 'Adam in *As You Like It* in dialect wouldn't have mattered, but the Ghost in *Hamlet* in broad Warwickshire would sound a bit queer.'

'Not so bad as in Cockney—or American,' I said. 'And imagine an American or a Cockney Macbeth—or Romeo.'

'I've heard a Juliet with more than a touch of it,' said Eugenius reflectively. 'But to go back to Lamb. He may have agreed with you about the acting of Shakespeare's plays, but he didn't agree with you that Shakespeare was never an actor. I looked him up the other day, after our first talk, on purpose.'

Eugenius pulled a thin volume out of his pocket and read:

'A Kindred mind! O who can read that affecting sonnet of Shakespeare which alludes to his profession as a player:

O, for my sake do you with Fortune chide,  
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide,  
Than public means which public manners breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand. . . .

Or that other confession:

Alas! 'tis true I have gone here and there,  
And made myself a motley to the view,  
Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear, . . .

Who can read these instances of jealous self-watchfulness in our sweet Shakespeare, and dream of congeniality between him and one that, by every tradition of him, appears to have been as mere a player as ever existed? . . .'

'Namely, *David Garrick*,' I interrupted. 'I know the passage well, Eugenius, and I agree that Lamb took it for granted, like everybody else, on the faith of that flimsy "stage-tradition" that Shakespeare *was* an actor, though it is equally clear he would have preferred not to think him one. If that preconception had not blinded him—or put him off

enquiry—he need not have supposed it. At least, those two sonnets, cx<sub>1</sub> and cx, do not prove him one if you read them unbiased and with no such preconception. Consider them a little. All they say is that Shakespeare had been compelled by stress of fortune to do that to earn a living which he would sooner not have done. Nobody would have supposed that this implied acting unless they had already assumed that he was an actor. The only word in either sonnet which can be argued to imply acting is the word “motley”. But the word “motley” on Elizabethan tongues, and especially in Shakespeare’s mouth, does not mark an actor, but a fool or jester:

A fool, a fool! I met a fool i’ the forest,  
A motley fool.

says Jaques after meeting Touchstone, and concludes, “. . . Motley’s the only wear”.

‘I might suggest that the sonnet confirms the suggestion you made the other day—or I, I forget which of us it was—that Southampton had wished Shakespeare to live with him as his tame fool or jester, and that Shakespeare had for a time—for needs must when hunger drives—accepted the position or had been handed over to some other of Southampton’s noble friends in a like capacity. I do not press it, but “I have gone here and there, and made myself a motley to the view” fits that suggestion better than merely acting on the stage would have done. I do not press it, however, because I think that what Shakespeare meant was simply that he had been forced to write popular plays when what he wanted to do was to have written poetry—or, if plays it must be, then plays like *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, which the managers would not look at.

‘These two sonnets, cx and cx<sub>1</sub>, come late in the series—indeed, very near the end of the first or youth series, before the Dark Lady appears. Suppose that they were written—it would fit the probable date very well—in 1592–3—soon after Shakespeare had achieved his first great popular success with 1 and 3 *Henry VI*. They were not plays he wanted to write; they were plays he wrote to order and, I suggest, against the grain. But they were a huge success, and though

one side of him was a little ashamed of them, the other side knew that he would have to go on with that sort of thing, for a time at least, to earn his bread and butter. His poverty but not his will consented.

'I think he would have felt Greene's gibe about that fustian line. He knew (none better) bombast when he saw it, and knew that line was bad, as he showed very plainly when he, as it were, parodied himself (as well as Marlowe) out of Pistol's mouth when he came, a freer agent now, to write *Henry IV*.

'Or suppose he wrote those two sonnets a little later, say in 1593-4 or 1594-5, when *Titus Andronicus* and *The Comedy of Errors* and *Richard III* and *The Taming of the Shrew* had been produced.

'He was not very proud of these either. He wanted to write poetry, and there is no poetry in any of these. Nor, if Southampton was at all fastidious and a lover of poetry (as it seems he was), would they greatly have appealed to Shakespeare's friend—patron—employer. Upon these suppositions the sonnets become abundantly clear, and *all* their lines fit the position. He is excusing himself to Southampton not for acting but for lowering or debasing his talents by writing to order, playing to the gallery, tickling the ears of the groundlings. "Gor'd mine own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear": does that apply to acting? No; but it does to writing popular stuff. You don't gore your thoughts or debase what is most dear by acting; but you do by writing pot-boilers.

'Or the lines in CXI:

Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand;  
Pity me then, and wish I were renewed; . . .

His name *had* received a brand from the older school of writers by the mouth of Greene, and he knew in his sensitive soul that it was not wholly undeserved. And, again, the expression that "his nature is subdued to what it works in, like the dyer's hand" has no meaning if applied to acting,

but a very clear meaning if applied to an artist who degrades his art for money.

'Fortunately, his nature was not so subdued. "Almost" he says in the exaggeration of crying *peccavi* to his friend, but he was never really anywhere near it, and as soon as he had got his foot firmly planted and was a member of the company and able to write as he chose, he wrote *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II* and *The Merchant of Venice* (all of which have some poetry in them) and made his company produce and act *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which he had written earlier, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I think he wrote about that time (1594) as a relief and to get the taste of *Titus Andronicus* out of his mouth.

'Later on, when he was part owner of the theatre and co-equal with Burbage and Kempe in importance to the company, as their playwright whose plays easily beat all others, he could write exactly as he pleased, and all the poetry in him went into his plays.'

'I've often wondered,' said Eugenius, 'what sort of poetry he would have written if he had not been more or less driven to writing plays. He couldn't have gone on writing *Venuses* and *Lucreces*, any more than Keats could have gone on writing *Endymions*.'

'I think we have all wondered about that, at times,' I said; 'but if it was fortune that so drove him, none of us will call her "guilty goddess", but be glad that she "did not better for his life provide"'. For that circumstance has given us *Henry IV* and *Twelfth Night* and *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* and *Lear* and *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*; and I very much doubt if Shakespeare, if his hand had not been forced to put his poetry into his plays, would ever have given us anything like so much—or anything like so good.'

'*O felix culpa!*' said Eugenius. 'Shakespeare wouldn't be the only genius who has come to no harm but done all the better for a little harnessing. He may not have thought so: he probably didn't at first, though I fancy he found out pretty soon; but it is clear enough to us now that plays were

the only, certainly the best, medium through which he could possibly have given us all he had to give. His knowledge of human nature and his miraculous capacity for getting into the minds of men—and women. His quips, his cranks, his wanton wiles; his tragedy, his humour, his laughter and his tears. Even his singing voice is sweeter in the plays than it could have been alone. It's a rum thing, but I've always felt that he would never have written those lyrics if he hadn't been writing plays in which he could set them like—like—well, there isn't anything like it. Whenever I'm reading a play and come across one of those lyrics I feel—I feel rather like as if I were eating oysters—very good oysters, mind you,—and found a pearl. And I always feel that Shakespeare liked those of his comedies best into which he put most lyrics.'

'Then *Twelfth Night* was his favourite comedy,' I said, 'and he wasn't far wrong. But look here, Eugenius, this is all very well, but you've taken me right off what was going to be the subject of this chapter. We've been talking for half an hour and it isn't begun yet.'

'What was it to be? Oh, yes! "Authenticity"—I remember. Go on, then. Only I hope you're not going to count lines of verse and prose and add up feminine endings.'

'I am not. But I've got to go back and pick up the Shakespeare-myth where I left it, in Chapter III, and carry it on from Coleridge to Professor Dover Wilson. Now, as to this question of authenticity, all the Shakespearean commentators, and most even of the real critics, profess to be able to say (some by counting lines and so forth, but the more sensible by sheer literary palate) whether Shakespeare wrote a play or whether he didn't; or which parts of a play he wrote and which certainly are not his; or whether he collaborated with someone and with whom, and which part was written by which. It is a comfortable, easy (except for the line-counters), and even pious proceeding; for it enables them (as we saw Coleridge did about the Porter's speech) to take all the bad lines, or what they, each of them, think bad lines (and they seldom agree), away from Shakespeare and give them to the other fellow: thus gratifying at once their own

critical acumen and keeping the master's literary honour untarnished.'

'Devilish obliged to them, I'm sure,' murmured Eugenius.

'I wonder if *he* is. Take *Henry VI* to begin with. Some deny it to him altogether. Some deny him Parts 1 and 2 and leave him Part 3. Nearly all cut great chunks out of all of it and leave him only the plums. Why? Is it necessary for his reputation as a playwright—or only for theirs as critics? May not such mistaken kindness even injure his reputation as a *man*? Did he not let it appear as his? Was it not acted as his? Did he not take money for it? Was it not the first step on his road to fortune—and to fame? But for it would he ever have got a share in that company? When there was the row with Greene, did he repudiate that jeered-at line—or any part of the play?

'Since he did not, but took the money and the credit, I say that he wrote all the play—all three parts—or he would not be the Shakespeare I think him or the Shakespeare Chettle thought him when he wrote of "his uprightness of dealing, which argues his honesty". Words, you will remember, written at the very time when *Henry VI*, by *William Shakespeare*, was taking the Elizabethan playgoers by storm.

'Is it not simpler and fairer and more honest to say: "Yes, Shakespeare wrote it all. Yes, it is full of bad lines. Yes, it is sometimes crude and sometimes bombastic. But remember, he was writing it to order and, probably against the grain, to please the public. It was his first play, too—written for the stage. Would you not *expect* bad lines and crudities? Is it not, rather, wonderful that there is so much good in it and so many lines that have the true Shakespearean ring?"

'Is not that better (besides more honest) criticism than to cut out whatever you don't like (such as the Joan of Arc episodes in Part 1, which are pretty beastly, but which, I'm afraid, went down with the Elizabethan gallery or even stalls) and assign them to someone else—unknown or guessed at? I do not see Shakespeare collaborating with anyone at any time. I do not understand . . .'

'Wait a moment, Yorick,' interrupted Eugenius. 'Your point as to Shakespeare's honesty is, I think, a good one. If he didn't write *Henry VI* he shouldn't have taken money and credit for it. But as to the bad lines or even whole acts or plays, the best critics—the real critics, like, for instance, Sir John Squire (I leave out the adding and subtracting machines and counters of rhymes and ready-reckoners of enjambements)—do not say they will allow *no* bad line to Shakespeare. They will answer you: "Yes, of course Shakespeare wrote bad lines, hundreds of them; but what *we* say is that though a certain sort of badness may be his, a certain other sort of badness could not. He simply *couldn't* have written *that sort* of tripe. It's like bad claret or bad sherry. Claret may be bad and sherry may be bad, but even bad claret must be claret and bad sherry is still sherry.'

'I know, I know. If they all agreed or if they were all André Simons of literature, like Sir John Squire, I might agree, too, but it is a dangerous quality to arrogate to yourself; and the proof of its danger is that they do *not*—even the good critics—all agree. I will talk of that later; but now I want to discuss this matter of collaboration. I have never been able to understand it. By all accounts, I know, it was an age of collaboration. Everybody, all the critics, assume collaboration as a starting-point (just as they assumed Shakespeare was an actor). But *how* did they collaborate? Nobody tells me that. Of course, there may be a book explaining exactly how it was done, for I cannot pretend to have read a twentieth part of all the books that have been written about Shakespeare and the Elizabethans (though I've read a good many), but, if so, I haven't come across it. All the books I've read simply say, "Here we see the hand of a collaborator—probably Fletcher"; or "He reverted in the following year to earlier habits of collaboration". Mere flat assertion. Or they will say, "Internal evidence makes it clear that the groundwork and most of the superstructure . . . were due to Shakespeare's colleague", but give neither the name of the "colleague" nor the method of their joint labour. Everybody seems to have collaborated. Beaumont and Fletcher, of course, had, so to speak, made each other honest men;



but all the others seem to have had loose and unacknowledged relations with their fellows, for there is not a playwright, from Marlowe to Massinger, who is not said to have collaborated with someone else at some time or other to produce a play. The difficulty, indeed, is to find a play that is admitted to be of single parentage. They are all half-bastards—children of no one man.

‘How did they do it? Did one supply the plot and the other do the writing, as they say Besant and Rice did at a later date? Or did one supply the ordinary dialogue and the other the set-pieces? Or one the tragedy and the other the comic relief? Or did they just write alternate acts—a thing almost incredible—and let it go at that?’

‘Why incredible?’ asked Eugenius. ‘Aren’t you and I writing this book, not in alternate chapters because you hog more than your share, but I collaborate as often as I’m allowed?’

‘Yes, my dear Eugenius. But you observe that *I* do all the *writing*. You provide ideas, but though I endeavour to clothe your flights of fancy—I beg your pardon, your luminous reconstructions of fact—in something like your own racy language, I am afraid I fail, and most of it sounds much the same as my own more pedestrian style.

‘I have to admit, I know, that the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists did permit each other to have a finger in each other’s plays, for even Ben Jonson admits that parts of one or two of his plays were not of his writing, and if so individual and cantankerous a man as he allowed it, I must agree that it is hard to deny that Shakespeare might have done so too. And yet I *cannot* see him collaborating with anybody. He was too much himself. He was too individual a workman. Once he got started he wrote so fast that a colleague would have annoyed him past bearing. He did not accept and use the words of others as his own. He wrote everything anew.

‘If you want to see the way he worked on an old chronicle or play, it is set out for you in Sir John Squire’s book *Shakespeare as a Dramatist*, where, on opposite pages, you may read on one the old play from which he took his *King John* and on the other what he made of it. He *rewrote*; he did

not adopt a single word. And I say that that is the way he always worked, and that all his plays which were acted under his supervision while he was an active member of the company are his and nobody else's.

'There is a more reasonable and likely way to account for the worst passages in some of the plays (such as the masques), and that is to suppose that, after he had ceased to supervise and had gone back to Stratford, and after his death, these were interpolated by others and so found their way into the First Folio.

'As regards Shakespeare's stage-craft in plot, construction, and device, Sir John Squire has said pretty well all there is to say (and said it luminously) in Chapter iv of that book, but even he is (I think) too ready to refuse to Shakespeare plays or parts of plays because they are of a sort of badness which was not Shakespeare's sort of badness. I like to think that I have a discriminating literary palate myself, but I am not sure that I would put it past Shakespeare to have written almost any kind of badness on occasion. The critic is (I think) on much safer ground when he says "This *is* Shakespeare; this cannot be anyone else" than when he says "This is *not* Shakespeare; it is impossible that he should have written this". I myself would swear to the affirmative proposition always and anywhere; I should always hesitate to swear to the negative. Sir John Squire (very rightly, as I think), on page 26, disagrees with Coleridge when he says that "Not a word was *ever* thrown by Shakespeare as a sop to the mob" or "Shakespeare never consciously wrote what was below himself"—a somewhat dubious way of praising a poet or dramatist; for if he "unconsciously" wrote what was below himself, it would surely be a more damning accusation.'

'Coleridge was probably thinking of Wordsworth,' said Eugenius. 'It would be quite true of him. He never did, but he often was.'

'Elsewhere in that book Sir John Squire recognises that Shakespeare had to consider his audience. He says, on page 34, "Shakespeare had his own difficulties with audiences; some of his hearers wanted poetry and philosophy, some

'knock-about stuff' and obscene jokes. They were very mixed."

'Well, then, if he agrees that Shakespeare did sometimes throw a sop to the mob, write below himself, give them knock-about stuff and obscene jokes—may not that account for nearly everything? For the Joan of Arc scenes in *I Henry VI*, for the bloody beastliness of *Titus Andronicus*, and even for those ghastly masques. Even as to them he might have said to Burbage, "Oh, all right. If they *must* have this sort of thing, here you are!"'

'He had to keep his eye on the political situation too,' said Eugenius, 'and that must have cramped his style a bit, living as he did under Elizabeth, with Walsingham and Cecil round the corner; or under James, with Gunpowder Plots being discovered.'

'Yes, but that would affect characterisation rather than language. I shall be talking about that when we come to discuss *Richard III*. It was certainly a time in which even poets and playwrights had to walk delicately; and it has always been a marvel to me that he escaped prosecution over *Richard II* when Essex was arraigned and done to death. He must have had powerful protectors.'

'Or he must have so softened the heart of the Virgin Queen by his compliment to her as "a fair vestal thronéd by the west" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that she forgave him for having alluded to and somewhat dwelt upon the possible dethronement—and murder—of kings, and therefore, by analogy, of queens.'

'Yes. It is the only time Shakespeare, in an age of horribly fulsome adulation, stooped to compliment Elizabeth. If you compare him with Spenser and all the rest—but Spenser particularly, who spent half his time in licking her shoes—he is in that respect as refreshing as in others.'

'It was only a very little—though a very pretty—one,' said Eugenius, 'and if a trifle untrue, one is, after all, permitted to adulate ladies falsely, especially when they are queens.'

'Now that you've mentioned political considerations, Eugenius,' I continued, 'I am reminded of another passage in Sir John Squire's book where he discusses the two plays

of *Henry VI* and *Henry VIII* together. It will come in pat here.

'He says (on p. 64):

It is very informing to compare the handling of these historical plays in which (on grounds having no relation to construction) Shakespeare is allowed to have had little hand with that of those which are undoubtedly his. The three parts of *Henry VI* and *Henry VIII* are patently, to anyone with any sense of character, morality and style, in the main not Shakespeare's. By the same token we discover that they are dramatically very defective. In *Henry VI* the authors (*sic*) if they were holding the mirror up to nature, must have been holding it up to the Wars of the Roses: the play has the same vagrant, discrete, wearily fluctuating, uncentred air. Characters are made transiently interesting and dropped again: there are moments of true Shakespeare, but they do not bring the true Shakespeare sequels; Henry VI (a character after Shakespeare's own heart) is once beautifully shown, but is otherwise only one amongst the miscellaneous peregrinating ruck of dukes and earls. When we are listening to Gloucester (whose part is an obvious preparation for *Richard III*) we hear the sustained voice of Shakespeare and feel what he would have done with that play, for all the historical difficulties, had he written it all himself. *Henry VIII*, by the same token, is one of the worst-shaped plays that ever was put upon the stage—redeemed by its fine passages and its pageantry. Had every line satisfied the syllable-counters (who note Fletcher everywhere) as being Shakespeare's, the construction would still have given us pause.

And so on, showing very clearly and well why both these plays (but particularly *Henry VIII*) are badly constructed and sprawling plays.

'Now, I do not complain that Sir John Squire takes it for granted that no one with any sense of character or style could think that Shakespeare wrote the whole of *Henry VI*. I know I am in a hopeless minority as to that, at any rate among all modern critics, though I am at one with Shakespeare's audiences and contemporaries and with his first editors, Heminge and Condell, who thought it his. But I do think he might have considered the distance of time between the two plays before subjecting them to the same standard of criticism. *Henry VI* is the first play he wrote (if he did

write it) for the stage; *Henry VIII* (if he did write it) is the last or very nearly the last. It is, at any rate, so late that you cannot plead inexperience as an excuse for faulty construction, as you can for *Henry VI*.

'Nor has *Henry VIII* the same excuse for sprawling or for being "invertebrate" as has *Henry VI*. The subject of *Henry VI* is, as Sir John has very well pointed out, a sprawling, "vagrant, discrete" affair. It would have been difficult even for Shakespeare in his prime to have made it concrete, or to have made of the Lancastrian king or of any of the ruck of dukes and earls a central figure and a continuous hero. He had to have a succession of them: Talbot in Part 1; Gloucester (until he is murdered) in Part 2; and in Part 3 Warwick and York and Edward IV between them. If he could have made a single hero or central figure it would have been (I think) Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, with whom, it is clear enough, he was in the most close sympathy of all of them. And it is Richard of York, and not Gloucester, whose part, I think, Sir John meant to say is "an obvious preparation for *Richard III*" (unless he meant the young Richard, who was not Gloucester till near the end of Part 3), as I shall show presently when we come to deal with *Richard III*. I hesitate very much to differ from Sir John Squire on any matter of criticism, but *Henry VI* seems to me to be exactly the play you would expect the young Shakespeare to have written at the time and under the circumstances in which he wrote it.

'He had then already, as Sir John rightly insists he always had, his eye on his audience. He was told to give them what they wanted, and in Part 1 he gave them Talbot. That he had judged rightly is proved by its instant success. We may not think much of those sprawling scenes, but it is clear that the Elizabethan audiences did. Else would Nashe (no friendly critic) have written as he did:

How would it have joyed brave Talbot to think that after he had lyne two hundred years in his Tombe he should triumphe againe on the Stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the tears of ten thousand spectators at leaste (at severall times) who, in the Tragedian that represents his person, imagine they beheld him fresh bleeding?

And as to Part 2, when he had a chance Shakespeare wrote what, to my ear, is undoubted Shakespeare. All Gloucester's (I mean Duke Humphrey's) speeches, from that in Act 1, Sc. 1: "Brave peers of England, pillars of the state", and all Richard of York's, from the fine and sustained one in the same scene beginning "Anjou and Maine are given to the French", are as good Shakespeare as anything in *King John*, at any rate. All the Jack Cade episode (though so many fastidious critics, including our Poet Laureate, don't like it and deny it to him) simply shouts Shakespeare to me. Shakespeare did not admire the mob, whether in England or in Rome; and the "sweaty nightcaps" of *Julius Cæsar* and the "bid them wash their faces and keep their teeth clean" of *Coriolanus* are evidence of the consistency of his aversion.

'As to King Henry VI, a character, I agree, after Shakespeare's own heart, I should have said that he is not only once but at least three times "beautifully shown". You will find the passages, Eugenius, easily enough, for you have already quoted one of them at the beginning of this book. And Henry's character is kept consistent throughout all the three parts, as, indeed, are all of them: Gloucester, York, Salisbury, Cardinal Beaufort, Margaret of Anjou, and the rest.

'As to York's fustian line, it is not so very bad. Queen Margaret was hoping that he would plead for mercy and she was just going to cut off his head, and he wasn't mincing his words. He had just called her "She-Wolf of France" (a phrase that Gray thought good enough to borrow for another tiger-hearted queen), and he had to go one better (or worse) before he ended.

'Now, as to the badness of *Henry VIII* there is no excuse for it, and I agree with Sir John in all he says about it. Particularly with his footnote to p. 65, which says:

Long before I knew anybody had breathed so heretical a suggestion, I had formed the opinion that Shakespeare may well have begun a *Henry VIII* in Elizabeth's time and then found that Tudors on the stage would be too dangerous, and held the manuscript over, to be ultimately dragged out of shape, enlarged, ornamented by Fletcher, when Elizabeth was safely underground.

This is, I believe, exactly what happened, except that I would say "by someone" rather than "by Fletcher"; for though I fancy I can recognise Shakespeare's voice when I hear it, I do not profess (as most Shakespearean commentators do) to be able to recognise the voices of all the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists and to distinguish, unerringly, the one from the other. It seems to me that to claim to be able to do so is to claim to be almost more than mortal.

'I have always thought, as Sir John thinks, that someone got hold of Shakespeare's manuscript in 1613 (when Shakespeare had returned to Stratford) and tried to make a pageant or revue-show of it. It clearly could not have been put on the stage in Elizabeth's life and must have been even rather dangerous to write, for all the parts that Shakespeare certainly wrote, especially the Catherine of Aragon scenes, show too plainly on which side his sympathies lay; and I remember that when I first read Dr. Johnson's criticism of the play, that "*the genius of Shakespeare comes in and goes out with Catherine*", it set me to reading the play again carefully, and I saw then more plainly why the play (for all its fine passages) is so bad a play, and why (as Sir John Squire says) "the invertebrate thing sprawls on, relying on costumes and physical movement for its hold; without a theme, without a hero, without a designated villain, without an end, happy or unhappy". Someone *had* interpolated scenes and dressed it up, dropped the Catherine theme, and made it a puppet-show. But interpolation or alteration behind the author's back is not collaboration, and I say again that Shakespeare never collaborated with anyone; and that if you must deny that he wrote any part of any play printed in the First Folio, it is both safer, and better criticism, to suppose that between the time of his retirement to Stratford in 1611, or between the time of his death in 1616, and 1623, the date of the First Folio, someone interpolated those passages you refuse to believe are his, rather than to say he collaborated with someone *whom he did not acknowledge as joint author* (which he never did), but let the plays be acted as his work alone and took the money for them. Since he was drawing his

considerable share of the profits on the sole strength of his authorship (for even those who say he was an actor agree that he ceased to act soon after he began to write, and that even when he acted it was in such minor parts as could not have justified his share) he would have been committing a fraud not only upon his collaborator, by holding himself out as the sole author, but also, incidentally, upon the company who were paying him his share for writing Shakespeare—not for writing Shakespeare-and-Water, or Shakespeare-and-Fletcher, or anybody else.’

‘I’ve never thought of it that way before,’ said Eugenius, ‘but I’m inclined to agree. For Shakespeare was essentially loyal. Loyalty is his second name. Disloyalty, especially among friends, is the sin he most deeply hates—perhaps it is the sin from which most deeply he suffered. There is no play of his, from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII*, in which he does not make it his theme or somewhere harp upon it. In the Sonnets it becomes a cry of pain—and I dare say the butterfly Southampton gave him cause. Southampton-Proteus; Shakespeare-Valentine: you could match the dual roles throughout the plays.’

‘In the most unlikely ones,’ I agreed. ‘He will bring it in—the hurt of disloyalty, I mean—where the action of the play does not need it, and even when he is re-writing history he will seize upon it and make it bleed. Listen to him in *Henry V*:

... But O,

What shall I say to thee, Lord Scrope? thou cruel  
Ingrateful, savage and inhuman creature!  
Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,  
That knew’st the very bottom of my soul,  
That almost mightst have coined me into gold  
Wouldst thou have practised on me for thy use,—  
May it be possible that foreign hire  
Could out of thee extract one spark of evil  
That might annoy my finger? ’tis so strange  
That, though the truth of it stands off as gross  
As black from white, my eye will scarcely see it.



There is a heart-cry there beyond anything in the Sonnets, and it becomes more bitter as it goes on, till it ends:

And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot,  
To mark the full-fraught man and best endued  
With some suspicion. I will weep for thee  
For this revolt of thine, methinks, is like  
Another fall of man. . . .

to sound as if the bottom of the world had fallen out for Shakespeare at some time in his life. I dare say Southampton was not the only friend from whom he suffered disloyalty.

'I cannot help feeling that if Shakespeare made a bargain with Burbage and the company (as it is clear he must have done), he held to it strictly both in the spirit and in the letter.'

'Yes, he would. And now, Yorick, I think you've said enough about collaboration.'

'So should I, Eugenius, but for the fact that all Shakespearean commentators have so taken it for granted, upon no direct evidence whatever (just as they have assumed on hearsay that he was an actor), that he continually collaborated, that the preconception will take a lot of breaking down. I could show easily enough, by quotation from them, that they all not only contradict each other, but continually contradict themselves—only it would take a volume to do it. I will select, therefore, Sir Sidney Lee, not because he is the most vulnerable nor the most self-contradictory (for he by no means is), but because when I enter the lists as an Unknown Knight I prefer to touch with my lance-point the bravest shield, and not, cowardly, select that of a lesser antagonist.

'Sir Sidney Lee is not one of the mere line-counters who add up the number of lines of prose, or rhymed or blank verse, of feminine endings and enjambements, and so forth, and come to positive (but varying) conclusions as the result of their mechanical labours, but he is obviously impressed by them and goes with the swim.

'He says, for instance (p. 408), "Although Shakespeare's powers were unexhausted he rested on his laurels after the colossal effort of *Lear*. . . . He reverted in the following year

to earlier habits of collaboration." *Earlier habits*, you observe: a pure assumption. "In two succeeding dramas, *Timon of Athens* and *Pericles*, he would appear, indeed, to have done little more than lend his hand to brilliant embellishments of the dull incoherence of very pedestrian pens. Only occasional episodes which Shakespeare's genius illumined lift them above the rank of mediocrity." What "pedestrian pens"? "Nowhere in *Timon* is there a glimmer of the true Greek spirit"—was there in *Troilus and Cressida*? "Internal evidence makes it clear that the groundwork and most of the superstructure of this incoherent tragedy were due to Shakespeare's colleague. To that crude pen must be assigned the whole of Acts III and IV and substantial portions of the three remaining scenes. Yet the characters of *Timon* himself and of the churlish Apemantus bear witness to Shakespeare's penetration." "Earlier habits of collaboration"—"pedestrian pens"—"Shakespeare's colleague"—"crude pen": all very convenient assumptions which will enable every critic, nay, every reader, of Shakespeare to pick out what he likes and reject what he dislikes. If Coleridge's way with the Porter's speech in *Macbeth* is, as Sir Walter Raleigh called it, "the very ecstasy of criticism", this of Lee's is its very delirium. If this sort of private judgement is to be permitted, each man will presently have his own *Shakespeare* specially printed for himself, and Shakespeare-sects will multiply and continue to propagate by scission.'

'Suppose,' suggested Eugenius, 'you applied the same sort of tests or criticism to any other writer—or, let us say, poet. To Wordsworth, say, or Tennyson. What would be left of them? If I denied to Wordsworth all the lines I thought dull and pedestrian or to Tennyson all the lines I thought mawkish or silly-sweet, they'd be printed in much slimmer volumes.'

'Yes. But, as you reminded me the other day, the better critics would not deny to Wordsworth his dull lines nor to Tennyson his silly-sweet ones. They would say, and truly, that Wordsworth was often naturally dull and Tennyson often a little sugary, and that when they got very dull or very sugary it was only a descent in degree and not in kind.'

'All very well,' said Eugenius, 'but I could find you lines in Wordsworth that do not sound Wordsworthian and more in Tennyson that do not sound Tennysonian. I could even find you lines in Browning (though you wouldn't think it) that Tennyson might almost have written, and lines in Tennyson that sound Browningsque.'

'Yes, and what about Milton? He would fare worse than ever at the hands of critics like, for instance, His Grace of York, who said the other day that "the longer poems of Milton bored him stiff".'

'Bang went *Paradise Lost*,' said Eugenius. 'What a lark!'

'No, no. His Grace did not say Milton did not write them. He was content simply to dislike them. But with Shakespeare they are not satisfied to stop at that. When they don't like his lines they say he didn't write them.'

'To go back to Sir Sidney Lee. Though not exactly a line-counter or "metrical table" maker, he believes that you can fix the order of date of the plays by those means. It is a common delusion and invariably leads to self-contradiction. For instance, in speaking of *Richard II* he says (p. 122): "As in the first and third parts of *Henry VI*, prose is avoided throughout and gardeners and attendants speak in verse like their betters, a sure sign of Shakespeare's youthful hand".'

'What about the second part of *Henry VI*?' said Eugenius. 'All the Jack Cade stuff is in prose, and there's a good deal of it.'

'Exactly. That is why Lee said first and third parts, and left out second. I don't know how he explained it to himself, but he always shuts his eyes to that horrid prose in Part 2. He says, again (p. 136), "To the year 1594 must be assigned one more historical piece, *King John*. Like the first and third parts of *Henry VI* and like *Richard II*, the play altogether excludes prose. Strained conceits and rhetorical extravagancies which tend to rant and bombast are clear proofs of early composition." Again Part 2 must be ignored because prose is not permitted to Shakespeare's "youthful hand". Why cannot they say that, as Dryden said,

he always rose to the occasion, and when verse was suitable, gave us verse, and when prose, prose?"

'Yes, it is so very clearly what he did,' said Eugenius. 'And as for the gardener in *Richard II*, he was a poetic gardener (like you, Yorick) and spoke in similes and parables, and so, of course, had to speak in verse. And as for "rhetorical extravagancies which tend to rant and bombast", why, the Bastard in *King John* was meant to be and is an extravagant and thrasonical person, and if he had talked otherwise he wouldn't have been himself. Besides which, Shakespeare was (let us admit it) rather fond of high-sounding speech and did not shed it with his youth. What about Hotspur now and then? And do I not rightly discern traces of it even in Prospero's boomings in *The Tempest*? It's an awful thing to say, Yorick, but may I whisper it in your ear that Prospero always reminds me a little of the Demon King in the pantomimes I used to see as a boy?"

'There is a touch of rhodomontade about him, I agree; but the reason is, with Hotspur, that a little rhodomontade, like "plucking bright honour from the pale-faced moon", is in keeping with one side of his character, just as his goading of Glendower is in keeping with another; and with Prospero, that Shakespeare meant him, I think, to be somewhat super-humanly didactic. He does not remind me of the Demon King (though I see what you mean), but I confess I have found him a little wearisome. I fancy Shakespeare found him a bit difficult to make completely real.

'As to Shakespeare's love of high-sounding speech, that good critic Sir Walter Raleigh agrees with you, Eugenius. He says: "It cannot be denied that Shakespeare had a great love of sumptuous rhetoric", and he adds, "but he also had a very happy humorous knack of contrasting it with reality". Hotspur had plenty of foils to him in *Henry IV*—including himself. Prospero rather needs one.'

'But we mustn't say that sort of thing, must we, Yorick? Because it is the accepted idea, sanctioned by the critics (nearly unanimous for once), that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's swan-song and that after writing it the "weary

and disillusioned Titan" retired to Stratford to plant mulberry trees.'

'Yes. They all want to see Shakespeare growing up mentally, and to follow his poetic and rhythmical development, and generally to psycho-analyse him. How he would have hated it! But it won't do. He cannot be taped and charted and meted and bounded and reduced to rule and measure. He keeps breaking out in odd places and confounding them. They forget what they have said themselves. Hear Sir Sidney Lee (who has just said, you remember, that making everyone speak verse is a sure sign of Shakespeare's youthful hand) when he tells us (p. 185): "Probably it was in conformity with Lyly's practice that Shakespeare had denied the ornament of verse to fully a third part of *Love's Labour's Lost*". Yet immediately before this he has told us that *Love's Labour's Lost* was certainly Shakespeare's *earliest* play, and he has noted that in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (which was probably his second) Launce and Speed talk prose and not, "like their betters", verse, as in *Richard II*.

'What are you to do with critics who blindly pursue a theory like this? Having determined to show that Shakespeare "developed" along certain lines, they flounder about in a maze of contradictions and troubles of their own making. In Chapter XIII of Lee's *Life*, which is headed "Development of Dramatic Power", he says, speaking of *All's Well that Ends Well*, "The style of *All's Well*, both as to language and to metre, presents a puzzling problem. Early and late features of Shakespeare's work are perplexingly combined". Why, yes, *if* you have chosen to say and maintain that his work *had* clearly defined "early" and "late" features, but not otherwise. "The proportion of rhyme to blank verse and the rhymed verse in which two of the episodes are penned is a clear sign of youthful artifice; one letter indeed takes the lyric (*sic*) form of a sonnet. On the other hand, nearly half the play is in prose and the metrical irregularities of the blank verse and its allegorical tenour are characteristic of the author's ripest efforts." Can any confusion be worse confounded?'

'It's a very ripe effort of Sir Sidney's, anyway,' said Eugenius, yawning.

'It would be if he had solved the problem,' I agreed, 'but he doesn't. He leaves it just like that; the "puzzling problem" unexplained and no attempt made to make this confounded play fit into his theories of the Development of Dramatic Power. When he comes to *Julius Caesar* (p. 333), which he puts in 1600, he says, "the metrical features hover between early regularity and late irregularity; and the deliberate employment of prose . . . would seem to anticipate at no long interval the like artistic usage in *Hamlet*. All these traits suggest a date of composition at the midmost point of the dramatist's career, and the autumn of 1600 satisfactorily answers the conditions of the problem".'

'Good!' interjected Eugenius. 'It got the coconut that time. But what would be the "non-deliberate employment of prose", Yorick?'

'"Peace, chewet, peace!" Sir Sidney Lee next treats of *Troilus and Cressida*, and says (p. 370):

This work . . . in style exceptionally unequal . . . combines characteristic features of his early and late performances . . . imagery as fantastic as *Romeo and Juliet*, intuition as penetrating as *King Lear* . . . problem resembles that in *All's Well* and may be solved by the assumption that the play was begun by Shakespeare in his early days and was completed in his season of maturity.'

'Oh yeah!' said Eugenius rudely. 'I dare say it might. You can solve most things with an assumption. This one doesn't come off quite so well as *Julius Caesar*.'

'And I wonder how many early plays Shakespeare had in his pocket and how much time he had in his season of maturity for completing them, or why he wouldn't while he was about it have made them "mature" all through. To continue. After glancing at *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*, both of which he assigns to the year 1604 (though he says that the latter is "far inferior" to the former—another instance, I suppose, of arrested development), Sir Sidney deals with *Macbeth* (p. 397). He rejects Coleridge's ascription of

the Porter's speech to "another hand" (mark how these critics differ even on the palate test), but goes on:

Yet there are signs that the play incorporates occasional passages by a second pen. Duncan's interview with the bleeding soldier (Act I, Sc. 2) falls so far below the style of the rest of the play as to suggest an interpolation by a hack of the theatre.'

'Did they keep hacks at the theatres?' asked Eugenius. 'Perhaps that was the way Shakespeare earned his living between 1586 and 1591—when he wasn't holding hacks' heads at the door.'

'Keep your ribaldry for you own chapters, Eugenius. Lee then goes on to *King Lear*, in which, he says, "Shakespeare's tragic genius moved without any faltering on Titanic heights", which is no doubt true, though I like the way Charles Lamb puts it rather better; and, after some remarks about "elliptical and elusive language" and "verbal and metrical temper" which convey little to my understanding, deals with *Timon of Athens* and *Pericles* in the drastic way I have quoted above.

'He is then left with *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*. Of the first two he says: "A popular theory presumes that Shakespeare's decade of tragedy, *i.e.* 1600-9, was the outcome of some spiritual calamity; of some episode of tragic gloom in his private life. No tangible evidence supports this allegation". It doesn't; it is the most . . .'

'"Decade of tragedy"—bosh!' exploded Eugenius. 'Shakespeare wrote tragedy when he was dealing with tragic themes, and comedy when he was dealing with themes proper to comedy. "Spiritual calamity!" "Tragic gloom!" Stuff and nonsense! Must a man be gloomy because he writes of tragic things? What about those unfortunate Greeks Sophocles and Æschylus and Euripides, who never wrote anything else, and could not switch back on to comedy like Shakespeare? Were they *always* miserable, *always* suffering from tragic episodes in their private lives; and, by converse, was Aristophanes always laughing? Look here, Yorick . . .'

'Wait a little. I'll let you rave presently if you'll let me finish with Sir Sidney. You will be glad to hear that Shakespeare recovered his spirits. "After completing *Coriolanus*", Lee says, on p. 420, "Shakespeare turned from the storm and stress of tragedy to the serener fields of meditative romance. A relaxation of the prolonged tragic strain was needed both by author and audience." He knows all about it, you see. "In *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* Shakespeare applied himself to perfecting the newest phases of romantic drama.'"

'Fudge,' growled Eugenius; 'he applied himself to writing three plays he liked writing and he thought would go down all right with his audience.'

I went on:

'Although *The Tempest* differs constructively from its companions, it completes the Trilogy. . . . If *The Tempest* comes no nearer ordinary Comedy than they, it is further removed from ordinary Tragedy. But it belongs to the category of its true predecessors by virtue of its romantic spirit, of the plenitude of its poetry, of its solemnity of tone, of its avoidance of the arbitrament of death.

With which portentous sentence Sir Sidney Lee concludes his investigation of the plays and of their authenticity and order of succession. Now you can say what you like, Eugenius.'

But Eugenius was smiling. 'I don't want to say anything,' he said. "'Avoidance of the arbitrament of death"—lovely! How do they think of these things, Yorick? What's it mean?'

'It means, Eugenius,' I said gravely, '(for I have been reading so much of it that I have got the hang of the thing), it means that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are queer plays that refuse to be put into any hard-and-fast category. It means that *Cymbeline* is hardly a comedy and yet not exactly a tragedy, for though an oaf of a queen's son is killed, that is hardly tragic, and though Imogen might very well have been stifled with pillows, like Desdemona, she wasn't. It means that *The Winter's Tale* is hardly a comedy and yet not exactly a tragedy, for though



the theme again is of unreasonable jealousy and suspicion, and people suffer and seem to die, they all come alive again at the end—except, of course, poor Antigonus, who was eaten by a bear and couldn't. It means that *The Tempest* is not exactly a comedy, nor even so near a tragedy as the other two, but a fantasia which ends as happily as could be expected from the swan-song of a disillusioned Titan.'

'Does it mean all that?' breathed Eugenius. "'*Avoidance of the arbitrament of death*"—wonderful! What a brainy chap you are, Yorick! You ought to have been a Shakespearean commentator yourself. Oh! I forgot, I suppose you are . . . I mean we are both being that now. Solemn thought!'

'It might be, Eugenius, but for you. You have, as Sir Walter Raleigh puts it, Shakespeare's "happy, humorous knack of contrasting my sumptuous rhetoric with reality"—not to say ribaldry. And that's all I am going to say about authenticity and the apostolic succession of the plays.'

'Aren't you going to say anything about Professor Dowden's "four stages in Shakespeare's career": "*In the Workshop*", "*In the World*", "*Out of the Depths*", and "*On the Heights*"?'

'I have said all I need, inferentially.'

'Or,' went on Eugenius, consulting a scribbled envelope, 'or about the "Parallel Test" invented by the late Professor Conrad?'

'No.'

'Or about Professor Sarrazin's "Vocabulary Test"?''

'No.'

'Do you mean to say, Yorick, that you are going to ignore Richard Roderick's "observations on the frequency of inverted first-foot stresses and redundant final syllables"?''

'I am.'

'Aren't you going to notice Charles Bathurst's study of the "coincidence of rhythmical pauses with line-endings"?''

'I am not.'

'Nor F. G. Fleay's "Tables", in which he enumerated for each play the total lines: those of blank verse, prose, and rhyme, the abnormally short and long lines, and the redundant syllables, which he called double endings?'

'Nothing would induce me to.'

'Good heavens!' said Eugenius, getting up and striding about the room, waving his scribbled envelope and occasionally stopping and peering at it. 'Have you nothing to say about Professor Tucker Brooke or Mr. C. M. Ingleby?'

'Not a word.'

'Nor any of the German line-counters? Professor König and his *Der Vers in Shakespeare's Dramen*, nor Dr. Karel on *King John* or Dr. Norpoth on *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, nor Professor Hertzberg on . . .? I can't read it. I tell you, Yorick, the amount of midnight oil spent on their researches, with their *Klingende* and *Gleitende* double-endings, with their *Doppeljamben* and *schroffe* and *leichte* overflows—which are quite different (mind you) from *milde* or *schwere* overflows—would have helped Germany to win the war if they hadn't used it in this better cause. Aren't you going to discuss and advertise their labours? Have a heart, Yorick!'

'I'm sorry, but I can't afford the space, Eugenius. This chapter is (as usual) too long already. But I'll tell you how Sir Edmund Chambers (that assiduous, cautious, and sensible man) sums the matter up. He says (Vol. I, p. 269):

In view of all the uncertainties attaching to the metrical tests, I do not believe that any one of them or any combination of them can be taken as authoritative in determining the succession of plays which come near to each other in date; and I have chiefly used them as controls for the indications of internal evidence.

He then gives his own chronological table—which I should say is as near accurate as no matter, except that I think he puts *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen* too late. He also prints in Appendix H to Vol. II a complete set of metrical tables compiled from the labours of these German and English human bees. There is no honey in them, but I recommended them to your study as a monument of human—or semi-human—industry.'

'Why are they all so frightfully keen on fixing the exact order of succession in which the plays were written?' asked Eugenius. 'It doesn't much matter, after all. The plays themselves are what matter.'

'O *sancta simplicitas!* What about Professor Dowden's "Four Stages"? They all want to watch Shakespeare growing up and "developing". That's all they care about. He's got to grow normally and sensibly and regularly, like a tree. So that when they cut him down they can count his "rings". And he annoys them frightfully when he won't grow like that, and they find (like Sir Sidney Lee) that he keeps on relapsing, and that his youthful sap seems to recur in his mature age, and that what they have set down as sure evidence of his 'prentice hand crops up again in his latest plays. How can you psycho-analyse a man so perverse? And *that* is what they want to do—not to read his plays and enjoy and wonder at them. I came across an illuminating sentence in Sir Edmund Chambers's book, in Chapter VIII, headed "The Problem of Chronology". He says, after quoting with approval the "admirable" four stages of Dowden (p. 252): "*A full literary and psychological analysis can only follow and not precede the establishment of a chronology*". And yet this is but an echo of Dowden (who has much to answer for) when, in Chapter VIII, "Shakespeare's Last Plays", he says:

In three chapters we have been chiefly concerned with observing the growth of Shakespeare's mind and art. *The essential prerequisite of such a study was a scheme of the chronological succession of Shakespeare's plays* which could be accepted as trustworthy in the main.

'You see now, Eugenius, what was the spur that these clear spirits did lend, what was that last infirmity of noble minds that induced all these professors, and simple laymen too, to scorn delights and live laborious days in counting lines and rhymes and double endings, and in searching for parallel thoughts and recurrent words—words twice or thrice employed (the *dislegomena* and *trislegomena* of Professor Sarrazin)—and all the rest of it?'

'I see,' said Eugenius. 'Well, and what is *your* conclusion, Yorick? For it is past one and Monday morning, and we had a long walk to-day and I want to go to bed.'

'My conclusion is that Shakespeare never collaborated with anyone and that, *so long as he was in active part-management of the company's theatre*, he never allowed

“hacks” or “crude pens” to supply or interpolate scenes. All the plays in the First Folio are by Shakespeare and by no one else. That leaves *Pericles* for the commentators to worry—and much good may it do them. In the case of one play in the Folio, *Henry VIII*, Sir John Squire’s suggested explanation is both likely and sufficient. As to all the others, any weaknesses, inconsistencies, or (if you like) bad lines and fallings-away can be sufficiently explained by the fact that Heminge and Condell were possibly to some extent working from transcripts or prompt-copies in cases where Shakespeare’s autograph copy could not be found.

‘But I do not think this was general. I see no good reason why the assurance of the editors Heminge and Condell (who were honest men and had clearly taken much pains over the collecting and collating of the plays) should not be accepted when they say in their Preface that “these are now offered to your view cured and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers as he conceived them”.

‘There is no reason whatever why Shakespeare’s actual autograph texts should not have been extant, carefully kept by the company, and at the editor’s disposal in 1623, and the Folio be, as they claim it, textually accurate—“as he conceived them”.

‘But, if you *must* question a line or a passage here and there, it is (as I have said before) both more likely to be true and better criticism to say that it crept in somehow between Shakespeare’s retirement or death and the year 1623, rather than to say that it was the work of a collaborator whom he never acknowledged and whose work he allowed to be held out and acted as being his own.’

## Chapter VIII

### INTERNAL EVIDENCE

*So when your Speculations tend  
Above their just and useful End,  
Although they promise strange and great  
Discoveries of Things far set,  
They are but idle Dreams and Fancies,  
And savour strongly of the Ganzas.  
Tell me but what's the nat'ral Cause,  
Why on a Sign no Painter draws  
The Full-Moon ever but the Half;  
Resolve that with your Jacob's Staff:  
Or why Wolves raise a Hubbub at her  
And Dogs howl when she shines in Water,  
And I shall freely give my Vote,  
You may know something more remote.*

HUDIBRAS

'Sir Edmund Chambers seems by your account, Yorick,' said Eugenius, 'for I haven't read his great book myself, to be a safe man to follow, and not given to imaginings, like most of the others.'

'He is very safe on the whole,' I agreed, 'and also a golconda-mine of information. But he too, though he discounts "metrical tests" and "tables" and most of the confusing litter of the line-counters, is bitten by the psycho-analytical insect and the desire to watch an orderly development in the mind of Shakespeare. It was, you remember, from his book that I quoted the sentence at the end of the last chapter as to why the chronology of the plays is so important. His worst sin, however, is the way in which he reads into Shakespeare's mind the minds of his characters, makes him a misanthropist with Timon, distraught with Lear, disillusioned and weary of life and of the world with Prospero.

It was from him (I regret to say) that I took most of the quotations in our first chapter about Shakespeare's changes of mood: "profound disillusion and discouragement", "New perturbation in the soul of Shakespeare", and so forth. They were quoted, in fact, from the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* signed E.K.C. and not from the book, where there is less of that sort of thing. As, however, at least a thousand people have read and will read the *Encyclopædia* article to every one who reads the book, Sir Edmund Chambers must bear the responsibility.'

'If that sort of thing is what they call "Internal Evidence",' said Eugenius, 'heaven preserve us from it.'

'There is one sort of internal evidence,' I said, 'from which you can, I think, find out from the plays what sort of a man Shakespeare was. I do not mean that it is evidence in the strict sense of the word, for, having been a lawyer, I use the word strictly, and in the strict sense the only evidence you can get from the plays is when they allude to some contemporary happening (as the Essex expedition in *Henry V*) which enables you to say that the play must have been written after that event.'

'The idea that Shakespeare was gloomy when he wrote tragedy and cheerful when he wrote humorous comedy is merely absurd, and when Sir Sidney Lee tells us (for instance) that "A popular theory presumes that Shakespeare's decade of Tragedy was the outcome of some spiritual calamity, of some episode of tragic gloom in his private life", it is quite certain that any such "popular theory" or belief (if it exists, which I doubt) must have been suggested by the commentators, from Schlegel onwards. The other sorts of internal evidence, derived from frequency or infrequency of rhymes and so forth, we have already dealt with and I don't think I need . . .'

'What is your sort of internal evidence which suggests the sort of man Shakespeare was?' asked Eugenius.

'The evidence of his characters, or rather the evidence of his own attitude to them. I mean that I think it is not very difficult to see—not always, but with regard, generally speaking, to one or two characters in every play—which

were his favourites, to see what sort of man (or woman) he liked best. Show me your friends and I will tell you what sort of a man you are, is as true of Shakespeare as of anybody else. By this I do not mean that you should identify him with any of his characters: that would be to fall into the foolishness of those commentators whose folly I have just been proclaiming.

'Shakespeare always stood aloof from his characters, above them, superior to them; fashioning them, breathing life into them as a creator should. He was their creator and they his creatures. But just as the Creator of all things has let us know what virtues are especially pleasing to Him—as humility, obedience, chastity, loving-kindness, justice, and truth—so Shakespeare (I think) lets us see what are the qualities in man and woman he most preferred, and which of his creatures he was able to endow with these qualities, without doing violence to historical or dramatic truth.

'There is one character that stands out as being, most patently, his favourite of all, the one whom he most admired and loved and whom he fashioned with the most creative care—and with a creator's understanding of his creature's weaknesses and strength—namely, Henry V of England. Whether as Prince Hal or as the King, whether playing the fool with Falstaff or baring his soul to God on the eve of Agincourt, Shakespeare is with him all the time, watching him like a guardian angel, condoning his folly, exulting in his prowess.

'I think that Henry V must have been his boyhood's hero and that he had fashioned him in his mind from the beginning. I think that when he was set to write the three parts of *Henry VI* and found that, though it was work to order and not what he would have chosen himself, historical plays could be made a vehicle for verse and lofty thought and the portraying of character, he began at once to plan the appearance of his boyhood's hero upon the stage. He would not go forward from *Henry VI*, but back; and he would go back far enough to prepare the stage for his hero's entry; and he would begin to show him young and in his salad days, so that he might keep him with him as long as

possible. When he was writing *Richard II* the young Prince was in his mind, and though that play may seem to set the stage for Bolingbroke, you find, when all is over and Richard dead and Bolingbroke seated on his uneasy throne, that it has really set the stage for Bolingbroke's son and heir. So much was the young Prince in his mind that he interrupts the story for a moment to insert, in Act v of *Richard II*, a reference to him which may serve as a text for the play of *Henry IV* which is to come.

SCENE III. WINDSOR. *A room in the Castle*

[*Enter Bolingbroke as King, Percy, and other Lords*]

BOLINGBROKE Can no man tell of my unthrifty son?

'Tis full three months since I did see him last:—

If any plague hang over us, 'tis he,

I would to God, my Lords, he might be found:

Inquire at London, 'mongst the taverns there,

For there, they say, he daily doth frequent,

With unrestrained, loose companions,—

Even such, they say, as stand in narrow lanes,

And beat our watch, and rob our passengers;

While he, young, wanton and effeminate boy,

Takes on the point of honour to support

So dissolute a crew.

PERCY My Lord, some two days since I saw the Prince,

And told him of these triumphs held in Oxford.

BOLINGBROKE And what said the gallant?

PERCY His answer was, he would unto the stews,

And from the commonest creature pluck a glove,

And wear it as a favour; and with that

He would unhorse the lustiest challenger.

BOLINGBROKE As dissolute as desperate; yet, through both

I see some sparkles of a better hope,

Which elder days may happily bring forth,—

But who comes here?

[*Enter Aumerle hastily*]

Then Scene 3 really begins. The conversation I have quoted had nothing whatever to do with the play of *Richard II*. It is put in there wantonly, deliberately, apropos of nothing, simply to prepare for *Henry IV*. It is a perfect prologue to that play, for in those few lines it tells you all Shakespeare wants you to know about him before he brings



Prince Hal himself upon the stage. Observe, also, the art which . . .'

'Wait a minute, Yorick,' interrupted Eugenius. 'It doesn't really matter, of course, but the commentators will probably tell you that Shakespeare put that little bit in *afterwards*. That he revised *Richard II* and put it in as an afterthought when he had begun to write *Henry IV*.'

'As you say; it wouldn't much affect my point if he did. But I don't believe it. I think he had it in his mind from the first. For I don't believe Shakespeare ever revised anything. He was both too busy and too careless. The man who never blotted a line in the heat of writing is not the man who afterwards troubles to revise or interpolate. Shakespeare, once he had started, saw things clear and saw them whole. And if anyone wanted him afterwards to alter what he had written, I think he would have replied, with Pilate, "*Quod scripsi, scripsi*".'

'Why do you always say that Shakespeare was careless, Yorick? The commentators will say that it isn't a compliment.'

'I only mean that he was careless of trifles—not of essentials. I have no doubt he pondered his plots and his characters and his situations and the ways by which he as dramatist was going to introduce them and put them over with the apparently artless art which you will find so thoroughly set out in Sir John Squire's book. But once he had got things clear in his mind and sat down to write, he did not hesitate and stop and scratch out and put in: he wrote like a thunderstorm—or the car of Juggernaut. He did not stop for small things: to verify a date or to consult an atlas to see if Bohemia had a sea-coast. Anachronisms were nothing to him, and all his characters are dressed in Elizabethan hose and doublet.

'To go back to Prince Hal. Did you observe which lord it was with whom Bolingbroke held that little conversation? Why, Percy—Hotspur! Any lord would have done—but no: it must be Percy. It must be that young thunderbolt of war Hotspur, who was afterwards so constantly to belittle the Prince of Wales and who was to die by that Prince's hand on the field of Shrewsbury with all his budding honours

thick upon him. All these scenes and speeches in *Henry IV* were in Shakespeare's mind when he was writing *Richard II*. He knew that he would make Prince Hal excuse himself to his father for his seeming follies by promising that he would:

... redeem all this on Percy's head,  
 And, in the closing of some glorious day,  
 Be bold to tell you that I am your son;  
 When I will wear a garment all of blood, . . .  
 And that shall be the day, whene'er it lights,  
 That this same child of honour and renown,  
 This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised Knight,  
 And your unthought-of Harry chance to meet.  
 For every honour sitting on his helm,  
 Would they were multitudes, and on my head  
 My shames redoubled! for the time shall come  
 That I shall make this northern youth exchange  
 His glorious deeds for my indignities.  
 Percy is but my factor, good my Lord, . . .

And he knew that, on Shrewsbury Field, Prince Hal would make good his promise and that, as that same Percy fell beneath his sword, he would complete the sentence unfinished on his lips.

'Percy was Prince Hal's factor: Percy was to be his redemption, and so it was Percy with whom Bolingbroke must speak and it must be from Percy's lips that we first hear of him and of his "dissolute and desperate" youth in London—a haunter of taverns and a patron of loose companions. It is a striking instance of Shakespeare's dramatic sense and craftsmanship; and it shows too, I think, that he took particular pains to depict the character of a man who was a man after his own heart. I think he saw something of himself in the Prince, and something he would have wished to be in the King. For Shakespeare himself was not averse to taverns, nor too precise for wantonness, nor too strait-laced for loose companions. Even when still young I have no doubt he had his serious side and did not spend all his evenings at the Mermaid or at the Devil with Marlowe or Dekker, but sometimes foregathered with the soberer Samuel Daniel at his garden house in London in Old Street,

St. Luke's, to talk about Avon and Delia, or with Michael Drayton, to talk about the battle of Agincourt or fairies. But though when work was to be done he would do it—none better or more assiduously—I think that always, to the end of his days, he loved the tavern life and the society of friends over wine and talk and jest and the exchange of wit, and human companionship; and the day's work done, he would as often as not bend his steps to the Mermaid to argue with Ben Jonson or sharpen his wit on the mind of whomsoever liked to engage him. He was an essentially "clubbable" man, as Dr. Johnson would have described it.

'As to Henry V, I do not suppose that Shakespeare's picture of him, whether as Prince or as King, is very closely like what the actual Henry was. He is the Henry Shakespeare saw as his ideal Henry, and so created; and it does not now very much matter what King Henry V really *was* like, for Shakespeare's picture of him holds the field and will hold it against the historical original to the end of time.

'But the point is, that Shakespeare loved him and put into his picture of him much of himself, of what he was and of what he would have wished to have been. He never let Hal or Henry fail. Whether in the tavern or in the field he always wins. He is the only one who in combat of wits can set Falstaff down, and he is the only one who can measure swords with Hotspur and make him food for worms. And it is to him, whenever he appears, that Shakespeare always gives all the best lines.

'Seeing, then, the kind of man Shakespeare loved, we can begin to get some idea of what kind of a man Shakespeare was himself: intensely human, loving human companionship, not taking life too seriously except when serious matters called; tolerant of all men; easy-going about trifles, but of strong will and instant decision when roused to action. For the most part regarding life as a thing to be enjoyed and amused at, and human nature as a thing to be studied and pondered over with equal recognition and understanding of its heights and depths, its noblenesses and its follies. "What a piece of work is man, how noble in spirit, how infinite in faculty"—and "Lord, what fools these

mortals be!" in equal and judicial measure. A man of singular equanimity of mind: most certainly not a man easily moved or cast down, nor given to fits of despondency or disillusionment, nor likely to "lash himself into loathing of his fellow men".

'You said that he gives Prince Hal and King Henry all the best lines in *Henry IV* and *Henry V*,' said Eugenius, 'and I agree that he does: whether Prince Hal is setting Falstaff down or excusing himself to his father in *Henry IV*; or whether in *Henry V* the King is talking to the French ambassador about the Dauphin's tennis balls or upbraiding Lord Scrope; or, most of all, in that great scene on the eve of Agincourt, the whole of which, I sometimes think, gave Shakespeare more pleasure in the writing than almost anything he ever wrote, for why . . .'

'Come, Eugenius,' I interrupted, 'it is a wonderful piece of work all through, but to say . . .'

' . . . for why else,' went on Eugenius, waving me down, 'why else did he himself praise it? He never advertised anything else he ever wrote; but in the Chorus before Act iv he calls the audience's special attention to it:

. . . Then, mean and gentle all,  
Behold, as may unworthiness define,  
*A little touch of Harry in the night;*

There you have Shakespeare's one and only blurb, and it is a beauty: "*A little touch of Harry in the night*"! If you only wanted to prove that Shakespeare loved Henry V, that line would have been enough. It breathes affection.'

'Wait a minute, Eugenius,' I interrupted. 'But do you remember what Q says about that very scene in his book *Shakespeare's Workmanship* you were quoting from the other day?' And I got up and fetched it and found the place. 'He is quoting from your own favourite scenes in the third part of *Henry VI*, and says:

I confess that, to me, the sad but yet selfish comment of  
Henry VI:

Sad-hearted men, much overgone with care  
Here sits a King more woeful than you are.

seems little, if at all, less hollow, as it holds far less sophistry, than the famous but sentimental, selfish, sophistical meditations of Henry V after the honest soldier Williams has floored him in argument.

'Good God!' exclaimed Eugenius. 'Did Q say that? I must have missed it. *Sentimental! selfish! sophistical!* Well, I never thought I should disagree with Q so utterly. They don't strike *me* that way.'

'Nor me,' I agreed. 'But I can see how they *might*—especially to anyone already prejudiced against Henry V. It is the only time that I, too, have found myself disagreeing violently with Q. But if you will read his talks on Falstaff again carefully I think you will see why, being such a lover of Falstaff—as indeed we all are, and you and I more than most—he has come to dislike the King. He cannot get over the King's disowning the old man; and I admit it is difficult, unless you believe (as I do) that Henry put it right afterwards.'

'Well, let's leave it at that,' said Eugenius, 'and let me go back to what I was saying. I agree with you, too, that Shakespeare liked to think himself like Prince Hal—or Prince Hal like himself—and that all the tavern scenes in *Henry IV* are versions of what actually happened at the Mermaid. The Boar's Head *is* the Mermaid; and if there was not a Francis a drawer at the Mermaid and all that "anon, anon" scene, down to the very pieces of sugar, was not enacted there between Francis and Shakespeare himself, then I am a shotten herring. That other scene too, when the Prince and Falstaff take turns to act the King-father and the Prince-son, was (I like to imagine) an echo of a scene which actually happened at the Mermaid when, after a bout of wit, Ben Jonson acted Shakespeare and tried to parody his style and presently Shakespeare dethroned him and acted Ben Jonson and parodied *his* style somewhat better.

'But what I was going to ask you was: do you think that Shakespeare always—or generally at any rate—gave his best lines to the characters he liked best?'

'Yes, I do. Subject, of course, to dramatic propriety or

historical necessity. But where he could, without violating these, he gave his best lines to the characters he liked best in so far as was possible, so as to be in keeping with their station or their character in the play. Of course, in the historical plays he had to keep, more or less, to history, or at least to history as he found it in Holinshed or in Plutarch; and he had also to keep his eye on his public and also on the prejudices of those in high places. He could openly make a hero of Talbot or of Henry V; it would not have been so safe to make a hero of Richard III. Even in these plays, though, I think you can discover his preferences, and in the comedies or plays of fancy, of course, he had a freer hand. You can see, I think, for instance in *Love's Labour's Lost* that Biron was his favourite. There is a good deal of the young, the poetic Shakespeare in Biron—a poet but no fool. And he certainly gives him the best lines in the play, all through. So, in the next play, *The Two Gentlemen*, Valentine, the loyal friend, has most of Shakespeare in him. So in . . .

'If you're right,' interrupted Eugenius, 'Mercutio must have been one of his most favourite characters, for though, of course, he had to give Romeo most of the fat, he certainly goes out of his way to give Mercutio more than the part demanded. The Queen Mab speech is deliberately dragged in by the heels to sweeten his lips.'

'You are quite right. Mercutio most certainly *was* a favourite with Shakespeare, and, again, I say I see much of Shakespeare in him—of certain sides of Shakespeare at any rate: his love of companionship, his wit, his inclination to flippancy to hide deeper feelings, and his poetry. You will remember that Dryden says in his *Essay on the Dramatique Poetry of the Last Age* that "Shakespear show'd the best of his skill in his *Mercutio* and he said himself, that he was forced to kill him in the third Act, to prevent being killed by him". Dryden goes on to say that he cannot see why Mercutio was "dangerous", for all that he (Dryden) could see, "he might have lived to the end of the Play, and dy'd in his bed without offence to any man": which proves, I am afraid, that Dryden was a little dull of comprehension (at the time of writing), for what Shakespeare (or whoever said

it) clearly meant was that he was getting so fond of Mercutio that he was giving him too many lines, and that he was getting out of hand and too big for the subordinate part he was originally cast for. Shakespeare was forced to kill Mercutio to prevent Mercutio killing the play. He was already, you will observe, out-talking and outshining Romeo—and this could not be allowed to go on.'

'Quite so,' said Eugenius. 'Glorious John was a bit slow in the uptake that time. I wish Shakespeare hadn't killed Mercutio, all the same; he is a very fascinating fellow. Are you going to go through all the plays and pick out Shakespeare's favourites?'

'It would take too long. But we might do some of them. The trouble is, of course, that Shakespeare was a man of such extraordinarily wide sympathies that he had a sort of sub-sympathy—I will not call it a sneaking sympathy—with nearly all his characters.'

'Call it a divine sympathy,' said Eugenius. 'He was for ever seeing a soul of goodness in things evil.'

'Yes; and even where he can find no good he always lets you see in the worst of his villains some excuse of human frailty for their evil. Therein they differ from all other Elizabethan villains, who in the hands of Marlowe or Webster (and worse still in the others) are villains unredeemed. There are no Barabases or Bosolas or Flamineos in Shakespeare. Of his two worst villains, even Iago has, at least, a legitimate grievance, and even Edmund in *King Lear* shows a flicker of repentance at the end. With all the others, though he does not justify them, he shows you that they were grievously tempted or that Fate had them in her toils, and bids you, before you stoop to cast a stone, consider whether you yourself, in like environment and assailed by like temptation, might not have been as evil. He gives moments of elevation even to Shylock, and when you see Macbeth, tempted by ambition, urged on by affection for his wife, hoodwinked by the witches' deceiving prophecies, going step by inexorable step to damnation, you can almost hear Shakespeare murmuring to himself, "There, but for the grace of God, goes William Shakespeare". This general

sympathy with and understanding of all his characters proves at once Shakespeare's greatness of soul and (as you put it) divine absolution of human weakness, but that we all knew already he possessed. It is his especial favourites, when you can spot them, who give you a closer insight into what I may call his diurnal, his week-a-day character.'

'Thinking it over on the lines you suggest,' said Eugenius, 'I can't see that he had any special favourite in *The Taming of the Shrew*, nor in *The Comedy of Errors*, nor in *All's Well that Ends Well* . . .'

'Unless it be Christopher Sly in the Prologue in the first and old Lafeu in the last,' I interrupted. 'Two very different persons, I agree—but Shakespeare was catholic-minded.'

'Yes. He liked Sly. He had a liking, there's no good pretending he hadn't, for cheerful rogues—a liking nearly as marked as his love for fools.'

'Oh, as for fools,' I said, 'if he saw some good in every knave, he saw more wisdom and much more fun in every fool. Indeed, he carried out St. Paul's injunction with regard to fools far beyond the letter of it, and instead of merely suffering them gladly, he revelled in them, and has left us such a gallery of fools—wise fools, foolish fools; fools rampant, regardant, passant, and couchant; fools natural and fools artificial; fools educated and fools in grain; fools that you clasp to your heart like brothers and fools you merely tolerate; but never a wholly repellent fool—a gallery such as no other writer, not Rabelais nor Cervantes nor Molière nor anyone, has ever come near to equalling, nor ever will. But go on with the plays.'

'In *Much Ado*, Benedick is clearly his favourite—I take it we are leaving the women out for the moment—for he certainly has the best lines; and I think I see something of Shakespeare in Benedick's attitude to life.

'In *As You Like It* I don't quite see anyone. Touchstone possibly, but the play is a little artificial to me. They are all his puppets, playing at picnics and the simple life in the Forest of Arden. I don't see him inside any of them—he only works the strings. Very nice puppets, of course.



'In *Twelfth Night* he likes all the characters so much that it is difficult to choose. They all have good lines. For whom do you vote?'

'Sir Toby Belch and Feste, the one as boon companion, the other as fellow-jester. I have told you that I think he put something of himself into all his serious clowns and jesters. And Sir Toby is an affectionate picture of Ben Jonson without his learning—Ben in his cups, rather far gone. Shakespeare loved Ben Jonson, admired and laughed at him; Ben Jonson loved Shakespeare and could not help admiring him, but with a sort of angry exasperation.'

'I don't wonder,' said Eugenius. 'You could hardly find two more opposite natures. They had a love of two things in common, however . . .'

'What were they?'

'Poetry and sherris sack,' said Eugenius. 'But, to go on with the plays. Who do you say was Shakespeare's favourite character in *Hamlet*?'

'Why, Hamlet, I suppose. Hamlet is a study by Shakespeare of what Shakespeare might have been if he had encouraged the introspective side of himself and had let his will-power get flaccid.'

'He gets all the best lines, certainly,' said Eugenius, 'but he had to, for the whole play is Hamlet; but I don't think Shakespeare liked him much. The man he liked in Hamlet was Horatio—the loyal friend, as usual, you observe. He would have given Horatio a lot more lines if he could, but I expect he remembered Mercutio and forbore. But he makes him out the most likeable—indeed, the only really likeable fellow of the whole lot.

'In *The Merchant of Venice* he doesn't seem to like anybody very much. He tried to like Bassanio, but found he couldn't, though he gave him some very good lines—such as his speech to Portia after he had chosen the right casket. I think myself that Lorenzo and Jessica, that pair of lovable young rogues, were his favourite characters in that play. He certainly went out of his way to give them the prettiest and most poetical scene.'

'I agree,' I said. 'It is when he goes out of his way to

give good lines, apart from the plot or importance of the character, that is the clearest sign of his liking. But, look here, Eugenius, we can't go on through all the plays, because I want to finish this chapter with talking about *Richard III*. Only what about Shakespeare's women? They give you a line on him, too—a very clear one. Which do you think he liked best?

'He loved them all,' said Eugenius. 'I think he loved each one best as he was making her. I find it much the same myself when I'm reading about them and listening to them and looking at them.'

'I cannot quite agree. Certain feminine virtues and attributes, it seems to me, he clearly preferred and emphasised. But what about his bad women? Haven't you noticed that when they are bad they are thoroughly bad? They have no redeeming features as the men villains have. Lady Macbeth perhaps has, but . . .'

'As what?' interrupted Eugenius.

'A certain nobility of character—but none of the others. Regan and Goneril are unredeemably repugnant. Margaret of Anjou (whom Shakespeare clearly hated, for he was a Yorkist *pur sang*), the Queen in *Cymbeline*, the Queen in *Pericles*.

'I won't say anything about *Titus Andronicus*, for everyone in that play is foul. There are not very many bad women, very few, in fact, considering the total number; but when they are bad, they are bad all through.'

'That is only to say that Shakespeare was, as usual, true to life. When women are bad they're always worse than men,' said Eugenius sententiously; 'but we'd better leave the women for another chapter. You get on with what you want to say about *Richard III*.'

'It is,' I said, 'a pendant to what we were saying about Prince Hal and the way in which Shakespeare prepared us beforehand, in *Richard II*, for his entry in *Henry IV*; and is also a tribute to Shakespeare's historical insight or instinct or understanding of true character, as you may prefer to attribute it. For I maintain, and I shall proceed to show, that Shakespeare saw through the Tudor lies about Richard

of Gloucester and knew him for what he was, brave, ambitious, avid of glory and fame, vengeful if you like, but never crafty or underhand, and no more cruel than any of his contemporaries. He saw him, in fact, as he really was, and is at last recognised to have been by all intelligent readers of history. He saw him as clearly as Chesterton, three hundred years later, saw him and painted him in his *Short History of England*.

'He had, indeed, as I shall show, a definite liking for Richard, not comparable of course with his liking for Prince Hal, and this liking most clearly appears in Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, where the young Richard is first introduced to us, and Shakespeare begins to present him to us as he first conceived him. Remember that these parts of *Henry VI* were written some two years before he wrote the play *Richard III*.

'And now let us look at these earlier plays, Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, where Richard of Gloucester first appears. He does not appear till Act v, Sc. 1, of Part 2, when his father, Richard Duke of York, is in open insurrection just before the first battle of St. Albans. He could not possibly have been there in arms, as represented, for he was only six years old at that date, but it is of no importance that Shakespeare makes him some ten years older; it is the words he puts into the mouth of this supposed youth of sixteen that matter. York is confronted by old Lord Clifford, who wishes to arrest him as a traitor:

CLIFFORD He is a traitor; let him to the Tower

And chop away that factious pate of his.

QN. MARGARET He is arrested, but will not obey;

His sons, he says, shall give their words for him.

YORK Will you not, sons?

EDWARD Ay, noble father, if our words will serve.

RICHARD *And if words will not, then our weapons shall.*

It is words for Edward, you observe, though he too was a fighter, but action for Richard; and immediately afterwards it is Richard, and not his elder brother, who defies the rugged Clifford and shows no fear of him.

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'We next see him on the actual field of St Albans, breathed with fighting. York, in the flush of victory, asks for news of Salisbury, "that winter lion":

RICHARD                                My noble father  
Three times to-day I helped him to his horse,  
Three times bestrid him, thrice I led him off,  
Persuaded him from any further act:  
But still, where danger was, still there I met him; . . .

and then:

**SALISBURY** . . . I thank you, Richard:  
God knows how long it is I have to live;  
And it hath pleased him that three times to-day  
You have defended me from imminent death.

And so ends Part 2 of *Henry VI*, the young Richard having appeared so far as a fearless and pugnacious boy, a loyal son, and a chivalrous defender of old warriors.

'Part 3 of *Henry VI* opens in the Parliament House in London after the battle. Edward and Montagu show their bloody swords in evidence of their prowess. Richard throws down the Duke of Somerset's head, saying simply: "Speak thou for me and tell them what I did." So that, apparently, he had not spent all his time looking after Salisbury! And his father cries out, "Richard hath best deserved of all my sons."

‘Thereafter in the wrangle that ensues it is always the boy Richard who counsels the bold and open course and will have his father seize the crown and have done with talking:

**RICHARD** Armed as we are, let's stay within this house.

and again:

**RICHARD** Father, tear the crown from the usurper's head.

and again:

**RICHARD** Sound drums and trumpets, and the king will fly!

In the end York rather weakly agrees to let King Henry reign for the rest of his life if the succession is assured to

him. Richard is not satisfied with this compromise—his was not the temperament for compromises—and the next scene (Sc. 2) opens with a discussion between him and his brother Edward, and afterwards his father, upon this matter. Edward and Richard urge their father to seize the throne at once. He objects his oath. Then:

EDWARD But, for a Kingdom, any oath may be broken:  
I would break a thousand oaths to reign one year.

RICHARD *No; God forbid your grace should be forsworn.*

He is, you observe, more scrupulous than his brother and exhibits, at any rate, that finer if worldly sense of honour and pride of family which Shakespeare had divined to be one of his chief qualities and is at pains to make apparent all through. I do not defend his subsequent casuistry when he urges his father that an oath taken under duress is not binding (though it is possibly defensible), but I will quote these lines from his speech to emphasise another mark of Shakespeare's understanding:

... and, father, do but think  
How sweet a thing it is to wear a crown,—  
Within whose circuit is Elysium  
And all that poets feign of bliss and joy.  
Why do we linger thus? . . .

Shakespeare is not blind to his ambition or his love of power, but he seems to me to go out of his way to show that it was of a finer quality than Edward's and that so far, at any rate, it was centred in his father, and born of his intense filial loyalty and pride of family. He was a Plantagenet—and of the elder branch. Right up to his father's death, and after, Shakespeare continually (and quite unnecessarily for the action of the play) makes opportunities to show Richard's two great qualities of fearlessness in action and love and admiration of his father.

'When, in the same scene, Sir John Mortimer counsels battle near Wakefield, York objects, "What, with five thousand men?" and Richard cries out, "Ay, with five

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hundred, father, for a need!" And on the fatal field of Wakefield itself again it is Richard, the boy warrior, the youngest, whom Shakespeare is at pains to make the chiefest hero.

YORK Three times did Richard make a lane to me;  
And thrice cried, *Courage, father! fight it out!* . . .  
And when the hardiest warriors did retire,  
Richard cried, *Charge! and give no foot of ground!*  
And cried, *A crown, or else a glorious tomb!*  
*A sceptre, or an earthly sepulchre!* . . .

Why does Shakespeare thus make York, on the very brink of death, so praise his youngest boy except because he himself held him in admiration and had discerned that, with all his faults, Richard of Gloucester had the greatest soul and was the most chivalrous-hearted of those four brothers?

'Why, again, does he throughout Act II continually, unnecessarily, and almost to the point of repletion bring out Richard's intense love of and loyalty to his father—surely not an ignoble trait?

'Nearly the whole of Act II is full of it. After the fatal field of Wakefield and before the news of the brutal killing of York, he is distraught with anxiety:

RICHARD I cannot joy until I be resolved  
Where our right valiant father is become . . .

and so on, praising and admiring his prowess in the fight, and ending, "Methinks 'tis prize enough to be his son!" And when the news comes, while his brother Edward cries out "O speak no more! for I have heard too much", Richard, the stronger spirit, must hear everything so that he may fix it in his mind till his father be avenged, and says, with a sort of deadly calm, "Say how he died, for I will hear it all." Having heard, he chides and heartens his brother:

RICHARD Nay, if thou be that princely eagle's bird,  
Show thy descent by gazing 'gainst the sun . . .

and thereafter he cannot rest till the bloody Clifford, his father's and his brother's murderer, has fallen to his sword.

Without ceasing, it is he who urges Warwick and the other Yorkist nobles to action.

RICHARD Shall we go throw away our coats of steel,  
And wrap our bodies in black mourning gowns,  
Numbering our Ave-Maries with our beads?  
Or shall we on the helmets of our foes  
Tell our devotion with revengeful arms?  
If for the last, say, Ay, and to it, lords.

And again:

RICHARD Then, Clifford, were thy heart as hard as steel,  
As thou hast shown it flinty by thy deeds,  
I come to pierce it,—or to give thee mine.

And when, later on, they are all parleying with Clifford, he cries out in a fever of impatience, "For God's sake, lords, give signal to the fight!" And so, on the field of Towton, he meets and kills, in fair fight, the murderer of his father and his brother Rutland. Clifford has little chance against that loyalty-inspired arm, as witness so good a judge as Warwick the Kingmaker:

WARWICK No, 'tis impossible he should escape;  
For, though before his face I speak the words,  
Your brother Richard marked him for the grave;  
And, whereso'er he is, he's surely dead.

'In Act III, I admit, there comes a change. The victorious Edward, who owed not a little of his victory to his brother, is dallying with Sir John Grey's widow, Elizabeth Woodville that was, and Richard's loyalty wavers and there is interpolated in this Act a long soliloquy in which, all at once, he appears as the stock figure of Tudor tradition, crafty, cruel, unscrupulous. This long speech is, as it were, a sort of forecast or rehearsal of the opening soliloquy of the play of *Richard III*, "Now is the winter of our discontent". It is nothing like as good as that more celebrated speech, indeed most of it is very sorry stuff, but Shakespeare either wrote it or perhaps only recast it and let it stand because it was time now he began to play to the gallery and give them the Duke of Gloucester—Richard had just been made Gloucester—whom they knew and would recognise; give

them, against his own better judgement, the Tudor caricature. But it is noticeable that he inserts it after Edward has shown that he means to degrade his Plantagenet blood by this ignoble marriage. Shakespeare understood, better than some who read this will do, how staggering such a derogation was in those days and how bitterly Richard, with his overweening pride of blood, would feel and resent it; and it is a tribute to Shakespeare's insight that he puts his finger unerringly upon the one thing that, as a matter of strict history, first warped Richard's open, chivalrous mind, awoke his personal ambition to the throne, and almost made him disloyal to his elder brother.

'Almost, but not quite, for, sorely angered and hurt as he was—and he would have felt it a thousand times more bitterly than the shallower Clarence—it was not he but Clarence who was twice the traitor. Shakespeare follows history in showing that he still stuck to his brother the King, while Clarence deserted him, in his adversity; but he goes beyond history when, in Sc. 5 of Act iv, he *invents* an episode in which he makes Richard the sole plotter and contriver of Edward's escape from Middleham Castle and, having provided horses, rides with him to Lynn, takes ship to Flanders, and so paves the way to the fields of Barnet and of Tewkesbury, and thus puts Edward back upon the throne—this time for good.

'It is not for me to make this invention of Shakespeare's—if it was an invention and not the record of some story handed down—sort with the Machiavellian soliloquy interpolated in Act III; it is for those who still wish to say that the Richard of the soliloquy was Shakespeare's true Richard, to explain it away, as they will also have to explain away all the previous instances I have given of Shakespeare's admiration and of his insistence on those qualities of openness and courage and chivalry and loyalty and filial devotion. And they will find it the more difficult to explain this passage than all the previous ones, for the simple reason that it comes after the soliloquy. They might say of the others, "Oh yes; up to that point Shakespeare may have intended to paint Richard in a favourable light, but there his nature



changed, and Shakespeare meant the soliloquy to mark the change”.

‘But will this do? Apart from the fact that it was a little sudden, how will they maintain that Shakespeare believed in his heart that this fustian stuff represented the real Richard, in face of his own record of Richard’s *subsequent* loyalty and devotion to his brother in his adversity? How explain why the man who is represented as saying of his brother:

Would he were wasted, marrow, bones and all  
That from his loins no hopeful branch may spring  
To cross me from the golden time I look for! . . .  
So do I wish the crown, being so far off;  
And so I chide the means that keep me from it;  
And so I say I’ll cut the causes off, . . .  
Why, I can smile and murder while I smile; . . .

and all the rest of it, did not leave the chief obstacle “between my soul’s desire and me” in prison when he was safely there? Or if he feared, in his bloody and Machiavellian mind, that the Lancastrians would not cut his brother’s head off quickly enough (though Queen Margaret was no sluggard with the axe!), what opportunities must that ride to Lynn have offered or, yet more, that passage across the North Sea to Flanders. A brotherly and affectionate converse on the slippery deck, a push—and all would have been over. And what a chance for the shedding of crocodile tears! Do not tell me that the *Tudor* Richard would have missed it!

‘Another point. How is it that it is in this precious soliloquy that we hear for the first time of Richard’s hump? Hitherto there has been no word of it. But now, all of a sudden, his arm is “shrunk up like a withered shrub”, he has “an envious mountain on his back”, his “legs are shaped of an unequal size”, he is “disproportioned in every part, like to a chaos, or an unlicked bear-whelp”. What? The fiery youth who urged his father to arms; who at St. Albans thrice bestrode and rescued the aged Salisbury; who thrice at Wakefield “made a lane” for his father and outdid “the hardiest warriors”; who on the bloody field of Towton met and slew the rugged Clifford! It will not do!

'We all know now, of course, that he was not a hump-back (though his right shoulder had been strained by a too fierce use of the sword), that his legs were of the same size, and that all this is only part of the Tudor lie; but the point is that this play makes it quite clear that Shakespeare knew it, too. No one can read the play dispassionately without seeing that this soliloquy is an excrescence, as monstrous and envious a mountain as that which (if I may use an Irishism) was *not* on Richard's back, and that Shakespeare put it there solely for the reason I have given, namely, that he was told that a Tudor audience must have a Tudor Richard, but that he did not himself believe a word of it.

'I have dwelt thus at length upon these two plays because it is upon these passages that I chiefly base my contention, and because also, so far as I know, their significance has been little observed and commented on. The more often I have read Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI*, the more I have become convinced that Shakespeare deliberately wrote and multiplied those passages in order that he might show, *where he dared*, what was his true conception of the quality and character of Richard.

'I come now to the play of *Richard III*, and I will admit at once that if this play stood by itself it would be difficult to be sure that Shakespeare had not been altogether deceived by the Tudor caricature; but I have already explained why, if he wrote a play with Richard in the title role and as the chief character, he *had* to follow that tradition. To tickle the ears of the groundlings he had to give him his hump, make him wade in blood, and throw in a whole gallery of ghosts; but I who write and you who read are not groundlings, and bearing in our minds the passages I have quoted from Parts 2 and 3 of *Henry VI* (and others I have had no space to quote), it is possible for us to see, even in this play of *Richard III*, some evidence of the fact that Shakespeare had an underlying admiration for Richard and wrote this play as it stands simply because he had to please the mob. To anyone who should object that I ought not to speak thus disrespectfully of the Swan of Avon I can only reply that it would be very much more disrespectful to suggest, as

these others must, that Shakespeare for once had lost his vision or, worse still, that having seen and set down in *Henry VI* the real Richard, he had now become converted to the popular view.

'It is interesting to compare, to begin with, the two soliloquies. You will see at once when you do, not only that the opening soliloquy of *Richard III* is infinitely better verse than the fustian stuff of the soliloquy of Part 3 of *Henry VI* (Act III, Sc. 2), but that the personal deformities are considerably toned down and that Richard, though still a villain, is no longer a mere monster. All through the play, too, though the villainy, the craft, the blood-lust are still insisted on and stressed (for reasons I have given), it is quite possible to see continual little touches of human nature and even a kind of puckish humour running right through the grim and bloody outward progress of this stage villain. Shakespeare had to make him a villain, but at any rate he gave him all the brains, and I am sure he enjoyed himself thoroughly when he was writing that extraordinary *tour de force* of Richard's wooing of Anne across King Henry's bier. Moreover—to revert to what we have agreed is a good test with Shakespeare—every good line in the play, with the sole exception of Clarence's dream, is put into Richard's mouth. Again, during all the earlier part of the play he makes it as clear as he could that, villain or no villain, his sympathies are more with Richard than with the Queen-relict and her upstart relatives, and, indeed, to the end of the play it is difficult to find anywhere a line that suggests that Shakespeare had any sympathy with Richard's enemies and victims. If he was a scoundrel, they were not much better, and above all it is quite clear that Shakespeare took no interest whatever in the colourless Richmond. In no other of his plays will you find so unheroic a hero; Shakespeare makes him as unconvincing a hero as he makes Richard an impossible villain. All the speeches he puts into his mouth are dull and empty. His speech near Tamworth, "Thus far into the bowels of the land . . .", is as flat as ditchwater; his prayer on the eve of battle has a distinct touch of the pharisee about it, and contrasted with the prayer of Henry V

before Agincourt shows itself as the thinnest lip-service compared with heart emotion; and his speech just before the battle, though a little better, is not much more convincing. Least convincing of all, even I imagine to the gallery, is the suggestion at the end that, after Richard had met and slain five counterfeit Richmonds, the sixth, the real Richmond, met and killed him!

'I agree,' said Eugenius, who had been listening very patiently. 'It is absolutely absurd. Richard Plantagenet, probably the finest sword in Europe at that date, to be killed in single combat by Henry of Richmond, a cold-blooded, crafty coward of whom, from his birth to his death, no deed of generosity or of valour is recorded! Shakespeare oughtn't to have fathered so obvious a lie.'

'Well, he does no more than half suggest it,' I said. 'He is careful to arrange it that Richard's death occurs off stage and we are left in doubt as to who killed him. It is Lord Stanley who says:

Courageous Richmond, well hast thou acquit thee!  
Lo, here, this long-usurp'd royalty  
From the dead temples of this bloody wretch  
Have I plucked off, to grace thy brows withal:  
Wear it, enjoy it, and make much of it.

'It would be hard to beat the banality of that last line, but in the further thirty-four lines which follow it and end the play Shakespeare very nearly manages to do so. A feebleness, tamer, more unconvincing, more impotent conclusion you will not find in any other of his plays, though he was rather inclined, sometimes, to huddle his endings.

'In *Richard III* it was sheer boredom. His heart was not in it. He had given the audience what they demanded: blood, treachery, craft, lying, the conventional stage-Richard; and I expect he said to Burbage (for whom it was very likely the first play he wrote), "Well, there you are. You said I had to give them this sort of stuff and I have—and I hope they'll like it. But it isn't the real Richard. You'll find a hint of the real Richard in my play of *Henry VI* that I wrote for Alleyn. Still, there you are, and on your head be it."

'I have dwelt on this tracing and developing of the character of Richard Plantagenet by Shakespeare because I think it illustrates and helps to prove two of my contentions: first, that you can tell by internal evidence of this sort what characters or, rather, what qualities in his characters Shakespeare most admired, and therefore can see what sort of a man Shakespeare was himself; and, secondly, that it is very dangerous to say of *any* passage or line that he couldn't possibly have written it, because, in his earlier plays at any rate, he was both writing to order and writing to please the audience in the way his employers—Alleyn or Burbage—thought they should be pleased. Later on he was able to choose his own subjects, and though he always (as all playwrights both must and should) wrote with an eye to his audience, he was not compelled to write *down* to them, as he was at first if Burbage so insisted.

'It is foolish to deny (with a loyalty which is quite unnecessary) that Shakespeare ever played to the gallery. Of course he did—and he went on doing it afterwards, even when he was not ordered to; but then he did it differently. But at first it is quite clear he could neither choose his subjects nor altogether handle them, when chosen for him, exactly as he chose. It is foolish, I say, of critics to deny it and to prefer to say, whenever any passage hurts them, "Oh, Shakespeare never wrote this." And it is the very commentators who would have you believe that for eight years, from 1585-6 to 1592-3, Shakespeare was gaining a penurious living by holding horses' heads at theatre doors and acting petty parts, who now insist that he could dictate to the manager who accepted his first play exactly what it should be about and insist that he should treat that subject as he chose!

'Imagine any young playwright to-day thinking he could do that. Of course Shakespeare couldn't. Even after the startling success of *Henry VI* he couldn't—yet. He had to write on such themes as Burbage dictated. Do you suppose he liked writing *Titus Andronicus*?—a good deal less, I imagine, than he liked writing *Richard III*, in which he *was* able to get in (sideways) some fine lines, much human nature,

and even some humour. He wrote them because he was told to and could not yet refuse. He was told—and it was true—that Tudor audiences liked blood and plenty of it; that they liked villains, not half-baked villains but good, sound, forthright villains about whom there could be no mistake; that they liked ghosts and a touch of the supernatural. So he gave it them; and that is the explanation of *Richard III*.

‘And so I say again that though critics—good critics, I mean, like Raleigh or Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch or Sir John Squire—may safely and truly claim to be able to say unerringly, “This *is* Shakespeare: no one but Shakespeare wrote this”, not even they, not anyone, can safely say, “This is *not* Shakespeare: Shakespeare *couldn’t* have written this”.

‘They may affirm the positive, and I am with them (for, indeed, I fondly believe I can do it myself), but when they affirm the negative I think they claim too much. For it is quite a different kind of judgement, as a study of logic will tell you, Eugenius. And just as truth is one, but error is manifold, so you can say, “This is the true Shakespeare”, but you cannot say “This is not bad Shakespeare—it is not his kind of badness”. There is no certainty about badness—and I believe, myself, that Shakespeare was capable, at odd times, of almost any kind.

‘And so I stick to the First Folio as my canon. The First Folio—*totus teres atque rotundus*.’

‘I’m much of the same opinion about collaboration and bad lines, and so forth, as you are, Yorick,’ said Eugenius. ‘But on this matter of Shakespeare giving the best lines to the characters he liked best, and thereby showing what he was like himself, I’ve been thinking that you might find some awkward results from applying the rule all round. Some malevolent person might make a list of all the good lines which his bad characters speak, and thus try to identify him with their bad qualities.’

‘I shouldn’t be afraid,’ I said boldly.

‘Oh, you wouldn’t? Well, that’s all right then,’ said Eugenius, with a sort of smile I didn’t quite like. ‘May I have the next chapter?’

‘Wasn’t it going to be about Shakespeare’s women?’

'Oh, that won't take long. We'll do that together, and then I'll finish the chapter off by proving to you that Shakespeare was a murderer.'

'The devil you will!'

'Yes; and it'll serve you right for theorising about Shakespeare giving the best lines to his favourite characters. You should leave theories to the commentators. I'd tell you about it now—but I want to look up a few passages first. I tell you what. We'll go for another walk to-morrow and leave the book alone till next week. That will be Easter. A good day to talk about Shakespeare's women. And I'll have my little piece ready for you by then.'

I went with Eugenius up to his bedroom to see that his fire was burning well, for it was again bitter cold. He was staying with me over Palm Sunday. When I had come down again and shut the front and locked the back doors of my farmhouse, I went again into the room where we had talked. A *Shakespeare* was lying open on the table, though I couldn't remember having left it so. The play was *Timon of Athens*, though we had not been reading or referring to that play for anything. I bent over the book to try the *sortes Shakespeareanæ*, and read:

... but, I perceive,  
Men must learn now with pity to dispense  
For policy sits above Conscience.

Appropriate, I thought (for I had been feeling a little unhappy about the war), but Shakespeare cannot mean that we too should set policy above conscience. So I read a little further and came to this: 'The devil knew not what he did when he made man politic,—he crossed himself by 't: and I cannot think but, in the end, the villainies of man will set him clear. How fairly this Lord strives to appear foul; takes virtuous copies to be wicked; like those that under hot, ardent zeal, would set whole realms on fire.'

And reassured by this piece of Shakespearean irony, I turned out the lights and went to bed.

## Chapter IX

### SHAKESPEARE A MURDERER

*How quietly the Spring comes here. I've seen,  
For weeks the withy-sallows flushing red,  
The spinneys show a warmer smoke of larch  
And elms grow purple: yet, though you'd have said  
That Spring had leapt to the rough arms of March,  
The hawthorn's hardly green.*

*The celandine lifts gold for all to see,  
Brave coltsfoot pushes, naked, from the plough,  
The lords-and-ladies leaves are burnished bright  
To lead the dance; strike up, musicians, now!—  
But in the copses blackthorn is not white  
Nor one anemone.*

*Though violets scent the lanes the primrose shy  
Puts out but scouting buds. Spring lingers long.  
I hear sap moving in the plumping trees  
But no bud bursts; birds sing but half their song.  
Earth whispers: 'Wait: sweets 'joyed by slow degrees  
Hold hope and memory.'*

*The Spring is here; I feel it in my breast  
With all the swelling buds of all the trees  
And all the reaching roots that push for space;  
But most I know when comes March' sudden breeze  
To fling the tickling rain-drops in my face  
Blown from the south and west.*

*I like this dallying. Not for my English eyes  
Or sudden sunrises or sudden dark  
Or dry rukh sweating into steamy leaf.  
I like to hear the slow sap through the bark  
Close-kissing, secret. Not for my belief  
Need miracles surprise.*

*This waiting time, expectant but how sure,  
Is happier than fulfilment ever knows.  
I know the sovereign sun will surely rise,  
I know the bud, too soon, will bloom a rose;  
But let me hold the gray dawn in the skies,  
Let budding-time endure.*



## THE REAL SHAKESPEARE

*Those low, gray, wondering eyes of waking dawn  
Thrill me as cannot the o'er mastering sun  
And buds hold more than roses ever give.  
Let all beginnings linger, once begun:  
What little time would lovers have to live  
Were love full-petalled born.*

### SPRING DELAYED

I was standing outside my gate on Holy Saturday morning as Eugenius came up from the road across the common by the rough track between the gorse. There was a strong south-wester blowing and driving clouds across the sun, and I was watching the cloud-shadows racing over the Chiltern hills—for I can see a long way from my front gate, my house being at the top of a little hill.

'It's the latest spring I've ever seen,' he said, as we greeted. 'There's not a flower out on your gorse and you have to look close to see green buds on your hawthorn hedges.'

'It is the latest I remember, too,' I said, 'and I go back in memory a good many years farther than you. But I could find you a branch of gorse in flower, though I should have to look for it. That never fails; but the old rule I have sworn by, for forty years and more—that there is always a double daffodil out on Passion Sunday, is gone by the board. There is one bud just breaking—a fortnight late. I have no flowers but snowdrops and a few of my special blue primroses for Our Lady on Easter Sunday. A late spring and an early Easter oughtn't to come together; it isn't fair. But come on in. It's a cold wind and I have a log fire burning in the morning-room; and we'll talk about Shakespeare's women.'

'I don't think late springs matter,' said Eugenius, when we had seated ourselves in front of the fire. 'Spring is bound to come, anyway, and I like a variable Easter.'

'So do I. I hate anything stereotyped. And I like an early Easter. It leaves more to come. I expect this spring will be one of those that come in a rush and all together. The daffodils will catch up the primroses, and the hawthorn be out before the blackthorn is over, and cowslips will scatter the

meadows before the marsh-marigolds are gone, and wood anemones will see the blue of bluebells for once before they die, and plum and cherry and pear and apple will all be out together and make the orchards a riot. I remember seeing the Vale of Evesham like that one year, long ago, from Dover Hill. Evesham and Pershore, and all the villages around, were smothered in their orchards and Avon ran between them in a trance. I think Shakespeare must have taken a holiday from Heaven that Easter—it was a late Easter that year—to come and see them.'

'Talking of Avon and Shakespeare's women,' said Eugenius, 'do you think he knew Delia—Daniel's Delia, I mean? I've never read the Sonnets to Delia, nor the *Complaint of Rosamund*, for that matter, but you told me once that Delia lived on the banks of Avon, and as Daniel was only a couple of years older than Shakespeare, they very likely met when he came courting Delia.'

'I rather fancy,' I said, 'that Delia was an imaginary young woman, although Daniel does place her by Avon. He is said to have written those sonnets when he was travelling in Italy. Still, he must have known Avon to place her there, and may very well have met Shakespeare when he came, and have talked poetry with him, and encouraged him to write *Venus and Adonis*. They certainly knew each other later on in London. As to Delia herself—well, they all wrote sonnets to their mistresses' eyebrows, from Sidney onwards, but I think the mistresses were imaginary, idealised: or, rather, composite portraits of all their loves together. All poets do this, naturally enough; and painters and sculptors, too. As one of Peacock's characters puts it somewhere: "The Venus of Zeuxis was the conjunction of all the beauties of all the virgins of Crotona". Of course, there may have been a concrete Delia and Shakespeare may have met and dallied with her on Avon banks, but he is more likely to have met Drayton's Idea.'

'Why?'

'Because Drayton was a Warwickshire man and was born at Hartshill, near Atherstone, not so very far away from Stratford, in the year 1563, so that he was only a year

older than Shakespeare, and they may very well have known each other as boys and gone birds'-nesting together. I like to think they were friends all their lives. Drayton had rich and powerful patrons from his boyhood and from the age of ten saw life in courts and camps, but it is said of him that he came to settle in London in the year 1590 "with his pockets full of verse", and he and Shakespeare would certainly, I feel, have met then again and renewed their friendship; and Drayton, very likely, would have introduced him to Ben Jonson and all the poets, if Southampton had not already done so. Shakespeare could have picked up much knowledge of court and camp from him, and he would have been, I think, a cheerful companion. He was no more averse to sack than Shakespeare was. Which reminds me . . . I got up and fetched the sherry decanter and glasses and set them on the table. 'So that we may put our lips to it when so disposed, as Sarah Gamp put it. I don't suppose she knew that she was quoting Homer:

Παρ δὲ δεπας οἶνοιο, πρὶν ὅτε θυμὸς ἀνώγει

"A cup of wine at hand to drink as inclination prompts".  
'Here's to Delia and Idea and all the virgins of Crotona,' said Eugenius, filling and lifting his glass, 'and to all Shakespeare's women. Which of them, do you think, Yorick, he liked best?'

'For our purpose, Eugenius,' I said, 'which is to see what sort of a man the real Shakespeare was, the question is not so much which one of his women characters he liked best as what qualities in women he most admired and most wished they should possess. As to their physical appearance, I think you will find it impossible to prove that he was a gentleman because he preferred blondes but married a brunette. We don't even know if Anne Hathaway was dark or fair, and I doubt if you can be sure of the colour of the eyes or hair of any of his heroines.'

'Oh, I can,' said Eugenius. 'Lady Macbeth had red hair, and so had Katharine and, I think, though I'm not so sure, so had Rosalind. Most of his heroines, I think, were fair. Ophelia was blue-eyed and with hair like barley;

Desdemona was golden, Titian gold; Cordelia too was fair; Beatrice was auburn; Viola I am not sure about, but I think she was dark—dark and slim and very graceful; Silvia was dark, with violet eyes, and so, I think, ~~was Imogen . . .~~

'No, no,' I interrupted. 'Imogen ~~was fair~~, I am sure, and had the bluest of blue eyes. Iachimo's description of her in bed is surely of a fair woman, though I admit you cannot be certain from it of the colour of her eyes. He says:

. . . the flame o' the taper  
Bows towards her and would underpeep her lids  
To see the enclosed lights, now canopied  
Under these windows, white and azure, laced  
With blue of heaven's own tinct.

But that is the blue of the veins on her white eyelids. Still, I am sure she was fair as Viola was dark, and as slim and graceful, for they both made lovely boys. When Arviragus carries Fidele's apparently dead body from the cave, Guiderius calls the supposed boy: "O sweetest, fairest lily".'

'It is the fact,' said Eugenius, 'that Shakespeare never describes any character directly. Such description as you get always comes casually and indirectly from what they themselves say or others say about them.'

'And he does it,' I said, 'with extraordinary and unapparent art not only as to their physical appearance but as to their characters. Sir John Squire in his chapter "*Dialogue as revealing Character*" has set this out with illustrations which have a most convincing and cumulative effect. A line, a couple of lines spoken indifferently by a friend, by a stranger, by the character himself and you know exactly what sort of a person to expect. He, or she, comes upon the stage and you know him, or her, at once intimately; and thereafter he continues to make them so speak and act in that same character a line has hinted at, that you would know them again if you met a hundred years hence or even heard them speak through closed doors.'

'We are wandering from the question,' said Eugenius, and pushed the sherry across. 'You said we were to talk about the qualities of Shakespeare's women.'

'Well, I will give you one to begin with which, though physical, is an index of character. He liked women to have soft and gentle voices. He says it in several places and implies it in more, but the crowning instance is, of course, when he says of the dead Cordelia:

Her voice was ever soft,  
Gentle, and low—*an excellent thing in woman.*

And Coriolanus calls his wife "my gracious silence".'

'Yes,' said Eugenius. 'I dare say Anne Hathaway was a bit strident at times.'

'Oh, leave poor Anne alone! I expect Shakespeare had a pleasant voice himself and I'm sure his mother, Mary Arden, had. She certainly was a very womanly woman, gentle but no fool—and that's the way he liked them. All his women are very feminine, even the bad ones. He didn't like mannish women—or hoydens.'

'What about the Shrew?'

'I don't think he liked her much.'

'He liked her better than he liked that velvet-pawed pussy-cat Bianca, Katharine's foil, anyway.'

'Oh yes. He didn't like pussy-cat or artful-demure women. He liked women to be forthright and individual and to have minds and brains of their own, but they must be feminine minds and brains. What he liked in Katharine was her directness and her honesty, and that is why he set up the false-demure Bianca as her foil, so that he might show in the end that once she found her mate she was capable of real love and true affection, whereas Bianca once she had got her man was not.'

'What about Rosalind? Isn't there a touch of the hoyden about her? Or, in a different way, Beatrice?'

'Rosalind only played up to her doublet and hose. She found it great fun to be dressed as and taken for a boy. It went to her head a little, and outwardly she was not so gentle as Viola, because she played the part better. But she was just as soft—just as womanly—inside. Hear her say to Celia after she has been sparring with Orlando and sent him off: "O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou

didst know how many fathom deep I am in love! But it cannot be sounded: my affection hath an unknown bottom, like the bay of Portugal". And as for Beatrice, she is woman incarnate.'

'Oh, I agree, Beatrice is as feminine as billy,' said Eugenius; 'but won't Benedick find her a bit of a handful?'

'Not a bit. They'll get on like a house afire.'

'M'm, yes; it would be rather like that, I fancy. What it comes to, Yorick, I think, is that he liked 'em affectionate and didn't mind anything so long as they were that.'

) 'Yes, affectionate and loyal. Loyalty was his paramount virtue, and he required it in women as much as he did in men.'

'It's more difficult to get with them,' said Eugenius.

'There spoke the bachelor-cynic. It's no good, Eugenius, you don't believe a word of it. Women are just as loyal as men—good ones, I mean—only they don't reason about it. And I'm old-fashioned enough to like them all the better for that. Shakespeare makes all his best women loyal. Look at Imogen; look at Desdemona; look at Cordelia. Once they had placed their affections they would be cut to pieces before they would believe a word of evil against those they loved. And Viola and Silvia and Rosalind (I'm not quite sure about Portia, whom I never liked), you feel that they would all have stood by you whatever you did. Which is, I fancy, what most of us men want of them.'

'Oh yes,' said Eugenius; 'but he didn't idealise women too much, all the same. As we were saying the other day, when he made them bad he made them bad all through. And even with the good ones he saw their little weaknesses. He understood the sex, all right. D'you notice how he makes them all susceptible to flattery, particularly to flattery of their personal charms? I think he makes them almost too easily cajoled. Look at the way Richard of Gloucester gets round Lady Anne. And all his heroines fall for a few soft words—look at Katharine of France and Henry V; and Juliet and Silvia and Viola and Rosalind and Perdita and Miranda, all fall at a touch. It's like picking ripe nectarines off a south wall! And even the Shrew and Beatrice don't

make much of a fight of it. As soon as Beatrice hears that Benedick is in love with her, she comes to heel.'

'Well, what would you have, Eugenius? Isn't that right and natural? In those days perhaps women were more easily cajoled than now (have you been disappointed?) and more ready to fall in love. But, after all, it is what they were, chiefly, made for. The rest is secondary—and I think Shakespeare was quite right to make them so. As to Katharine of France, she was only a pawn and would have had to marry Henry whether she liked it or not. And Henry V was a great king and (I imagine) no bad lover. And as to Anne of Warwick, Richard was a subtle flatterer, and remember that he too was going to be a king. Nice customs curtesy to great kings, and so do women. Few women have resisted kings, even when they did not offer marriage. A woman naturally likes to be a queen, even if only *en titre*. Besides, don't you think it is right that a woman should always take it as a compliment that a man is in love with her, even though she wouldn't have him at any price? I think I should if I'd been born a girl. Wouldn't you?'

'I've never thought about it,' said Eugenius coyly. 'P'raps I should.'

'Of course you would—and you know you'd think any woman unnatural who didn't, and a humbug if she pretended she didn't. They all do; and the crowning instance in Shakespeare is Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. Listen.' I opened the *Shakespeare* on the table and read:

'DUKE He dies for Claudio's death.

ISABELLA Most bounteous Sir [*kneeling*]

Look, if it please you, on this man condemned,

As if my brother lived: I partly think

A due sincerity governed his deeds

*Till he did look on me:* since it is so

Let him not die. My brother had but justice,

In that he did the thing for which he died:

For Angelo,

His act did not o'ertake his bad intent,

And must be buried but as an intent

That perished by the way; thoughts are no subjects;

Intents but merely thoughts.

Thus does Isabella, a nun and Shakespeare's emblem of chastity, "a thing enskied and sainted", yet, because she is still a woman, plead for the man who, though his love was guilty, yet had paid her the compliment of falling in love with her. So strong was this extenuating circumstance (added no doubt to her natural kindness of heart) that it completely destroyed for the moment her sense of logic and of moral philosophy.'

'Anyway,' said Eugenius, 'it shows that Shakespeare understood women and that he liked them affectionate and loyal. Which, as you said, my dear Yorick, helps to show us what sort of a man he was himself. And now, I vote we go out into the garden and look for that double daffodil before lunch; and then after lunch, when you're feeling strong, I will deliver my little lesson to you not to theorise.'

'Theorise!' I said, as we went out together. 'I like that. What about your sea voyages and shipwrecks? You are not the man to cavil at theories.'

'Mine aren't theories,' said Eugenius simply. 'They are logical deductions from known facts. Thus they become facts themselves. Like all the deductions and discoveries of modern science and philosophy.'

'Very like,' I agreed. 'Thank God daffodils remain daffodils.'

'When daffodils begin to peer,' began Eugenius.

'They've been peering a long time,' I said; 'but this one'—for we had arrived at *the* double daffodil—'this one has burst its sheath and is showing yellow, and, late as it is, all his brothers will brave the winds before the swallow dares.'

'When is your first swallow up here?' asked Eugenius.

'A week after our first cuckoo.'

'And when's that?'

'Generally St. George's day, the 23rd April. Never before the 18th. I mean I've never heard one call "cuckoo" before that: but I believe cuckoos arrive some time before they start cuckooing. I saw one last year at least three days before I heard one. They are uncanny birds. There has been nearly as much argument about them and how they lay their eggs



as there has been about Shakespeare and how he wrote—or didn't write—his plays.'

'How *do* they lay them?' asked Eugenius, picking snow-drops which were scattered like a drift under the lee of the garden hedge.

'They lay them on the ground and pick them up in their bills and pop them into other birds' nests. Preferably hedge-sparrows. I've seen them.'

Eugenius raised himself from stooping among the snow-drops and lifted an eyebrow at me.

'I don't mean that I ever saw a cuckoo actually pop an egg into a nest,' I admitted. 'I never got near enough. But I've seen her pick up an egg in her beak and fly off to a hedge, where I've afterwards found a hedge-sparrow's nest with a cuckoo's egg in it.'

'Why do they choose hedge-sparrows?' asked Eugenius, still looking a little sceptical. 'I should have thought it simpler for them to choose nests of birds that build on the ground or in banks, like wrens and robins.'

'So should I; but I've never found a cuckoo's egg in a robin's or a wren's nest. I can only suggest that, if they did, the young cuckoo would find it harder to push the other young birds out of a nest on the ground-floor. Whereas if the nest is up a little way in a hedge, on the first floor, he's only got to shoulder them up and tip them over.'

'You have a horrid mind, Yorick,' said Eugenius. 'And what's all this about cuckoos got to do with Shakespeare?'

'He was inordinately fond of cuckoos,' I said gravely.

'So he was, and so were the Swiss,' said Eugenius, with equal gravity. 'I wonder why cuckoo-clocks have died out?'

'You have a mind like a kaleidoscope, Eugenius,' I said. 'Because, I expect, cuckoo-clocks belong to an age of comparative childhood and we are now too sophisticated. I remember I killed our cuckoo at home when I was a boy. I shot him with an airgun as he was coming out of the clock.'

'It must have been quick shooting,' said Eugenius. 'I wish I'd thought of it. I expect I should have if we'd had a cuckoo-clock—but we hadn't.'

'Well, you see,' I confessed, 'I waited till it was striking twelve. And I had to have two shots then. I got him with the second. Let's come in to lunch.'

. . . . .

After lunch—which was a proper war lunch and consisted chiefly (I don't mind telling you) of bread and cheese (English), and no celery (because the frost had killed all mine), but pickled shallots instead, and, of course, beer—after lunch we pulled our chairs to the fire (for though it was sunny outdoors, it was still cold within) and Eugenius pulled a manuscript out of his pocket.

'I've written this,' he said, 'in the approved style of an article about a new Shakespeare discovery, and I hope you'll like it, Yorick.'

'I'm sure I shall,' I said. 'You have an infinite capacity for deductions and I always admire your style.'

'I've called it simply: *Shakespeare a Murderer*,' he added, looking at me for approval.

'Simple and direct,' I agreed encouragingly. 'Go ahead,' and Eugenius read as follows:

### 'SHAKESPEARE A MURDERER'

'Shakespeare has been conclusively proved to have been very nearly everything—and everybody—except, perhaps, Bacon.

'Because he displays an intimate knowledge of law and legal terms he must have been, at one time, a lawyer; because he is at home with courtiers, a courtier; because he praises wine, a drunkard; because he leads the simple life, an anchorite; because he discourses learnedly, a wise man; and because fools and jesters are almost his favourite characters, a fool. It is easy to prove out of his own mouth, by this method, that he was each and every one of these and a dozen others; the only drawback being that, unless we are to suppose that he out-Zimried Buckingham in being "everything by turns and nothing long", the proofs become mutually and increasingly inter-destructive.

'I do not mean to suggest that this method of arriving at the truth of who and what Shakespeare actually *was* is wrong. Far from me be it to cast doubts upon that system of inductive reasoning which has given us so many and such varied—and varying—"scientific truths". But it is clear there is something wanting in it, something elusive that needs to be superadded, whereby we may distinguish which among all these certain and logical inductions is the right one. One of them, of course, assuming that all the ground has been covered, that, as the journalists say, "every avenue has been explored", *must* be the right one. But *has* every avenue been explored? I think not; and I propose to lead you up the garden and see what we can find, giving you the benefit of the researches I have already made on the way, to beguile the time.

'Now, I will confess that at first I was led astray by that school of Shakespearean students who swear by the great principle of quantity and the counting of heads. Those laborious gentlemen, I mean, who count all the lines in all the plays and then double them, and having divided the total by the number they first thought of and deducted from the quotient the number of "feminine endings", "enjambements", and what not, tell you (with a perfectly straight face) the year the play was written in and whether Marlowe or Dekker had a hand in it or whether William did it all by himself. Their system impressed me. Let us go by the *number* of lines, I said to myself, that are devoted to lawyers, courtiers, drunkards, anchorites, wise men, fools, and so forth. Clearly, whichever scored most lines won. However it might come out, *that* was what Shakespeare certainly *was*. Simple, logical, irrefutable—but, of course, tedious. I set to work. I will not say how many years it took me, nor boast for how long I scorned delights and lived laborious days. In the pursuit of Truth I would . . . but enough. What was the result is all you want to know. The result was that kings came out on top. Easily; it was almost a case of kings first and the rest nowhere. If you included queens it made the race a procession; and if you added princes, princesses, and other persons of the blood royal

(excluding, of course, the bastard Faulconbridge in *King John*), the thing became absurd. At any rate, the conclusion was obvious and inevitable—Shakespeare was a king or at least of the blood royal. Of course he was. I could see that clearly now. Everything was made plain by it. His leaving Stratford, his hiding in London, his consorting with actors, his leaning towards the stage and stage plays, his sonnets, his sack, his second-best bed, the Dark Lady, the Earl of Pembroke, his sympathy with the underdog, his alternate bouts of cheerfulness and dejection, his constant harping upon fallen greatness, "Mr. W. H.", and the play of *Richard II*. Particularly the play of *Richard II*.

'At first I dallied with the idea that he was the son of one of the young princes who were, I know, *not* murdered in the Tower by Richard, but kept alive and got rid of later by Henry VII. There were difficulties, however; and I was, on the whole, inclining to believe him a son of Warwick (the son of Clarence), who when he escaped from the Tower with Perkin Warbeck would have had plenty of time to found a family . . . when it was borne in upon me that, after all, it wouldn't do. Much as I should have liked to believe that Shakespeare was the last of the Plantagenets and the rightful heir to the English crown, the thesis was untenable for the simple reason that Henry VII—a far more calculating, cold-blooded, and thorough murderer than Richard III—would never have left any son of the young princes or of Warwick, or of any other better heir to the throne than himself alive. History, in fact, proves that he didn't.

'So there was an end of that. I was not altogether sorry, for I had always leaned to the idea that Shakespeare was a court fool rather than a king, and I had hoped that in the counting of lines the fools would have come out on top. As a matter of fact, they had come out second—a bad second, it is true, but now that the kings were out of it they fell into first place; and I at once took up my investigations again on that line.

'It will be clear to everyone that if Shakespeare could be proved to have been a fool or jester, almost all the difficulties of his plays and most of the obscurities of his life

would be solved and clarified at once, and I had almost succeeded in satisfying myself that I had proved it by the collation of innumerable passages from the lips of his fools and jesters, when again my hopes were shattered, and it became clear to me that I was only following up a red-herring which Shakespeare himself had deliberately laid across the track.

'I happened to be copying out that passage from *As You Like It* (Act II, Sc. 5) where Jaques sings:

If it do come to pass  
That any man turn ass . . .  
Ducdame, ducdame, ducdame;  
Here shall he see  
Gross fools as he . . .

and immediately, in answer to Amiens' question as to what "duc-dame" means, tells us that, "'Tis a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle".

'That was enough for me. My eyes were opened. I saw that Shakespeare had very nearly made an ass of me and that I had barely escaped being drawn into the fools' circle he had so cunningly planned. Sadly I saw my castle of cards settle down; grimly I tore up and consigned to the flames my serried notebooks. I looked at the portrait of Shakespeare that stands always on my desk; it seemed to smile.

'"Others abide our question: thou art free",' I murmured bitterly. Matthew Arnold was right.

'For a long time I was in despair. I could hardly eat or drink; I could not sleep at all. The work of half a lifetime was wasted. And then, one joyful day, I happened to be listlessly turning the leaves of, I think, the *Times Literary Supplement*—or it may have been *The Athenæum*—and I came upon a discussion that was then apparently engaging the best brains of Britain, with occasional incursions by high-brows from American universities, upon the question, "*Who was the 3rd Murderer in 'Macbeth'—and why?*"—or words to that effect. It woke me from my lethargy. I was like the warhorse in Job (xxxix. 25): "When he heareth the trumpet he saith: Ha, ha: he smelleth the battle afar off, the encouraging of the captains, and the shouting of the army".

I said "Ha, ha" as the Truth—this time the Real Truth—flashed upon me: *the 3rd Murderer in "Macbeth" was Shakespeare himself*. This, of course, is to put it crudely, for though I said "Ha, ha" and the Truth flashed upon me, I had, of course, to verify it, and when I had done so it presented itself in no less certain but somewhat modified or amplified form. I should put it now more exactly if I said "the 3rd Murderer in *Macbeth* is the embodied spirit of Shakespeare".

'But having now reached that point in the garden where this new and wholly unexplored avenue debouches, I will ask you to accompany me step by step in my investigations. I will not weary you with the discussion in the *Supplement*—or whatever paper it was—for it was almost entirely otiose.

'Everybody agreed that the simple explanation of the intrusion of this third, hitherto unmentioned, murderer which is given by the 2nd Murderer—viz. that Macbeth had sent him because he mistrusted No. 1 and No. 2, and as a spy or to make sure they did not falter—was too simple. There was more in it than *that*, they all agreed, but beyond that they did not agree at all.

'In the infinite deal of nothing that they talked there was no gleam of light. But they had sent me to the text, and I found the text illuminating. What struck me at once—and why it had never struck me before is a mystery—was the extraordinarily matter-of-course, natural way in which Shakespeare introduces his murderers and the almost sympathetic light in which he presents them. Take these *Macbeth* murderers. Says Macbeth (Act III, Sc. 1) to an attendant:

. . . attend those men

Our pleasure?

ATTENDANT They are, my Lord, without the palace gate.

MACBETH Bring them before us.

[*Exit Attendant*]

Macbeth goes on talking to himself and presently comes the stage direction:

[*Re-enter Attendant, with two Murderers*]

MACBETH Now go to the door, and stay there till we call.

[*Exit Attendant*]

Just like that. Just as we should say nowadays:

[*Re-enter Butler, with a tray of cocktails*]

MYSELF Now go to the pantry and bring more when I ring.

[*Exit Butler*]

And Macbeth goes on easily:

Was it not yesterday we spoke together?

1ST MUR. It was, so please your highness.

And so it goes on, Macbeth treating them as equals and emphasising the fact—read the scene for yourselves—that they are *men*, and men above the average in breeding and courage and the qualities that go to the making of men, who (I quote him) “have a station in the file, and not i’ the worst rank of manhood”.

‘In the actual scene of the murder of Banquo (Sc. 3), I could not but observe also that the murderers all three comport themselves with simplicity and discretion and even a certain dignity; as does, again, the 1st Murderer when he reports the outcome of the transaction and its partial failure.

‘These are not, I reflected, like the murderers of other Elizabethan dramatists—not like Webster’s or Tourneur’s or Dekker’s or Kyd’s, terrible, bloody, warped, inhuman. They are just simple human men going about their ordinary business, earning their wages in the way of their calling, and taking just that necessary and proper pride in their work as is necessary if they are to make a good job of it. *Why*, then, are they different? A light began to dawn on me. *Why* does Shakespeare make them human and almost sympathetic? The light grew clearer. But I would not yet embrace the obvious conclusion. Though it blazed upon me as clear as the sun at noonday, I would go carefully—I would make sure—I would examine all his other plays where murderers are, and see if they too were so introduced and so presented and were of the same character and composition as the murderers in *Macbeth*.

‘Now, about this time it so happened that a learned Shakespearean student—one, indeed, not i’ the worst rank of such studenthood—suggested to me that you could always certainly tell which of his characters Shakespeare liked best

by seeing to whom he gave the best lines to speak. With this further touchstone in hand, so to speak, I proceeded to examine all the other plays.

'It took me some time, but the result was, to put it quite mildly, staggering. In every single play in which Shakespeare introduces murderers—and though he is not so lavish of them as he is of kings and does not make them (as, indeed, you might expect) quite so common as fools and jesters, he uses quite a good few of them—he introduces them in a simple and matter-of-course manner, and presents them sympathetically. Nay, more; he gives them, occasionally, some of his best lines to speak—that sure test of Shakespeare's liking for a man.

'And now I began to see clearly not only the simple conclusion to which all this was inevitably leading me—for that I had seen at once when I said "Ha, ha"—but also how perfectly that conclusion would provide its own innate proof, would furnish that elusive something which, as I said at the beginning of this essay, it was necessary to find in order to distinguish the real truth from the many "shadows and counterfeits" which, as Douglas complained at the battle of Shrewsbury and Richard at the battle of Bosworth, kept masquerading in its garments.

'It was clear, of course, that Shakespeare was a murderer; not necessarily nor even probably an habitual one, but a man who had, at one time or another, killed a fellow-man. Else the status and condition of murderers could not have seemed to him so normal and, as he makes Macbeth put it, "not i' the worst rank of manhood", nor could he have presented them in a way so totally different from every other Elizabethan dramatist. "But," you will object, and I have been expecting and embrace your objection, "you have just proved in the same way that Shakespeare was a king and admitted you were wrong; and then that he was a fool or jester, and found you were wrong again."

'Ah! but mark how a plain tale shall set you down: see how the touchstone of Truth—the Real Truth I mean, this time—when applied will at once inerrably distinguish the true truth from the counterfeit. All this business of proving



Shakespeare to be this, that, or the other by his mere knowledge of their ways or language or peculiarities was wrong, as, indeed, I saw at the first. It proved too much. Even to go by his sympathies was misleading. For a man may sympathise with kings very easily, and yet not be a king. A man may sympathise, less easily no doubt (I beg your pardon, Yorick), but I conceive it to be possible, with lawyers and yet be himself no lawyer. A man may, quite naturally, sympathise with fools and yet be no fool. I myself, as you may have observed, have a considerable sympathy with fools, yet no one reading this paper could conceivably, I submit, take me for a fool.

'No. *But could anyone sympathise with murderers unless he were himself a murderer?* You see the difference? You cannot help but see it—it lies there gross as a mountain, open, palpable. This was the test, this the touchstone: to find out which of all Shakespeare's manifold and catholic sympathies was the one impossible to be held except it implied complete identification. I have found it. In every other case a merely vicarious sympathy is natural, possible, conceivable. In this case it is not. *Ergo—Shakespeare was a murderer.*

'I have perhaps been a little hasty in carrying you so swiftly to the conclusion, clear as it is, without going through the evidence somewhat more in detail, but I was naturally anxious to share my discovery with you at once. Let me hark back a little. There is not space in this little essay to go through a tithe of all the murderers' speeches in Shakespeare, but I would ask you, bearing the scenes in *Macbeth* in your mind, to look next at the Two Murderers in *Richard III* (Act 1, Sc. 3 and 4).

'It is significant that the English king hails them on their entrance, just as the Scottish king had done, as his fellows and equals:

How now, my hardy, stout-resolved mates,  
Are you now going to despatch this thing?

he asks—"this thing" being the murder of Clarence. "Mates", you observe, and I call it significant, because neither Macbeth nor Richard of Gloucester were, ordinarily, what you would call "matey".

'But that is a small point. It is Scene 4, and the long and profoundly philosophical discussion between the Two Murderers before they carry out their job—or, rather, before the 1st Murderer does it pretty well single-handed—which I wish you to study. It will repay your study. I cannot go through it here, the text is there for your leisure, but I venture to say that, as a treatise in moral philosophy—I had almost said theology—from the point of view of the man in the street or the average middle-class murderer, Shakespeare has done nothing better. The simple logic of the 1st Murderer is strictly admirable, the vacillation and semi-remorse of the 2nd Murderer are intensely human; and it is impossible to read the whole of this scene without becoming convinced that here we have, at last, Shakespeare himself in the persons of these two murderers, and that the argument carried on between them mirrors the argument that was waged between Shakespeare's conscience and temptation on that fatal day when he himself succumbed and took a human life.

'It is astonishing to me that this great scene has been so little noted. In my judgement it is one of Shakespeare's best; and the 2nd Murderer's catechism of Conscience may well stand comparison with Falstaff's celebrated catechism of Honour.

'I suppose I need hardly point out how this discovery clears up everything. More than if I had proved Shakespeare to have been royal and far more than if I had proved him to have been a fool, the fact that he had taken human life explains his disappearance from Stratford and the mantle of secrecy which he has so successfully wrapped about himself. It used to be said that he had fled because he had killed a deer. When the deer-killing was proved a myth, his unhappy marriage was made the reason; and it is true that a nagging wife and an unhappy home provide a sufficient one, till a better can be shown. How much better, how much more completely convincing is this of the *killing of a man*, and how it explains that continued and persistent secrecy which has puzzled the world till now! It explains all the other matters I have mentioned above, and this as well. It explains, too, the somewhat morbid dwelling upon death

and a certain indifference to bloodshed which—let us be candid—mark some of his plays. Whom it was that he had killed I do not pretend to say: probably, I imagine, one or both of those officious yeomen Fulk Sandells and John Richardson. But that is of no consequence. If you ask me how it was he was able in later life to return to Stratford, I reply that the court influence he had assiduously cultivated and his friendship with Southampton (or with Pembroke) at last enabled him to obtain a pardon from the crown. It all helps to explain his plays and what we know of himself and his life in London. It is all of a piece, and the more you examine it the more convincing it becomes.

'Well; there it is. I take no special credit for it. Read carefully every line that Shakespeare has put into the mouths of his murderers and you will inevitably and independently arrive at the conclusion I have reached.

'There you are, Yorick,' concluded Eugenius, tossing the manuscript across to me. 'Do what you like with it. You brought it on yourself, you know.'

'I shall certainly put it in the Book,' I said. 'It will fill up this Chapter IX very well, and our talk about Shakespeare's women will form an admirable introduction to it. The matter of it impresses me very much, and you have caught the style, although with your tongue in your cheek; and, do you know, as you were reading it I began almost to believe there is something in it.'

'So did I while I was writing it,' said Eugenius. 'I expect all Shakespeare discoverers feel like that. There's a subtle drug in the Shakespeare thicket—a sort of Comus-Circe enchantment. I got quite carried away.'

'Look here,' I said, 'let's have a look at that scene in *Richard III*. I think we ought to set it out in full.' I picked up *Shakespeare* and turned the pages. 'Here we are—Act I, Sc. 4—*Enter the two Murderers*. Great heavens! I'd clean forgotten it was so long—there are three whole pages of it.' I began to read. 'You are quite right, Eugenius: Shakespeare must have been deeply interested in the ethics of murder to write all this.' I went on reading. 'M'm, I'm afraid it is too

long to put in the Book, but every reader of ours ought to look it up. It is marvellous. A study of conscience, as you say, Eugenius. And the conclusion would well bear out the suggestion, in your paper, that a murder explains his flight from Stratford in 1585-6:

1ST MUR Well, I'll go hide the body in some hole,  
Till that the Duke give order for his burial;  
And when I have my meed I will away;  
For this will out and then I must not stay.'

'Just so,' said Eugenius. 'Of course, it does not affect my account of his second voyage, but only adds another reason why he had to go. I do not insist on the murder. That is only a theory. He went to seek his fortune; but if he *had* murdered those two yeomen—or anybody—he would have been killing two birds with one stone: seeking safety and fortune in one ship. But, you know, Yorick, I really wrote that just to show you that your pet idea, that Shakespeare always gives his best lines to the characters he liked best, is dangerous and might be a bit of a boomerang.'

'I don't think it affects my claim,' I said. 'After all, you can't say he gave his *best* lines to any murderer. All you have shown is that he could understand murderers just as well as he could understand anybody else. That his knowledge of human nature and understanding of the workings of the human mind were so comprehensive that no human being was outside it. When he drew Timon he said to himself: "Supposing I had become so soured by the falseness and ingratitude and self-seeking and meanness of men and women that I came to loathe humanity, what should I say? How should I act?" And behold we have Timon. So with all his characters, and with murderers no more and no less than kings or clowns.

'But now, Eugenius, it is Easter morning and I wish you a Happy Easter. After Mass this morning we will go for another walk (and this time we shall really find the spring), and we will go into inns and drink to the winning of the war.'

'And the eternal damnation of Prussianism and Nazism,' said Eugenius. 'Amen.'

## Chapter X

### WHAT DOES NOT HAPPEN IN HAMLET

*William, forgive me. Nowadays  
You live in circles so exclusive  
That we can only sing your praise  
At risk of being thought intrusive.  
When great Professors throng your doors  
And raise a monument of books to you  
A fellow on the lower floors  
Must needs be humble when he looks to you.*

*The learned Fathers of the Church,  
The Schoolmen with their school editions,  
Archæologues of deep research,  
Bird-lovers, ladies, politicians—  
They all surround you with a pile  
Of writing—reasoned and canonical.  
You sit inside it with a smile  
Perhaps a trifle—well—ironical.*

#### JONES'S WEDDING

It was a fortnight after Easter before Eugenius and I—the Inner War Cabinet, so to speak—forgathered again. Things had been quiet on the Shakespeare front and (except for writing up previous talks) I had been digging like mad in the garden. The end of March and beginning of April is a bad time for a gardener to write books in. The garden is so much more important (and won't wait), and digging and planting seeds induce an Olympian carelessness of syntax and grammar, and induce one (you observe) to end sentences with prepositions. Not that I trouble about such things. These little journalistic rediscoveries of ancient rules of grammar or syntax do not impress me. And, anyway, I prefer to write as I talk, except when once in a way I indulge in a purple passage. (Who invented *that* phrase, I wonder?) I am much more concerned to avoid clichés,

which (you see) leap to one's pen in the most affectionate manner however much you hate them, and to eschew words like normalcy and surplusage and epoch-making and gotten (which is a false archaism) and closen and ideology and similar words for which there are quite simple existing equivalents, and which are therefore as unnecessary as they are ugly. That last word 'ideology' has come out in spots all over Europe during the last few years, and every statesman and every nation seems to have got measles. It doesn't mean any more than 'idea,' or 'habit of mind' or 'mental outlook', according as it is used; but it has a convenient comprehensive vagueness, I suppose. For myself, I like the words I use to really mean something—even if I split an infinitive in saying so. And I do not ever 'sense' things. I either see, hear, touch, taste, or smell them—as my rude forefathers used to do.

'Yes, yes,' interrupted Eugenius impatiently, for I had been rambling on in this fashion to him while making notes for this chapter, 'all this is devilish interesting and we know you're the last of the diehards, but what are you scribbling? What's this chapter to be about? How many more chapters are there going to be?'

'Only two more after this. There will be twelve chapters in all. I am a duodecimalist. The inch is the true unit of measurement and the pyramids clearly prove, as Professor Flinders Petrie or someone else has shown, that . . .'

'What a old image it is!' interrupted Eugenius again, with all Sam Weller's irreverence for age. 'With its pyramids and its professors and I don't know what. Can't you stick to your job? If there are to be only two more chapters, we ought to devote this one to the commentators. We've left them alone for some time, and this book is to be a Counterblast, don't forget.'

'Very well,' I said peaceably. 'Let me see. Have you read a book called *What Happens in Hamlet*, by Professor Dover Wilson?'

'No,' said Eugenius. 'I haven't and I don't want to. I know what happens in *Hamlet*.'

'Are you quite sure, Eugenius?'

'Of course I am. Hamlet's uncle has married his mother,

and he has been shoved out of the succession and is, "like the chameleon, promise-crammed with air" and pretty sick about it. Then he is told by his father's ghost that his uncle poisoned him (I mean his father—these "hises" and "hims" are the devil), and he is out for blood.

'To make quite sure first that the ghost was a truthful ghost and to be relied on, he gets up a play (he calls it "The Mouse-trap") to be acted in front of his uncle and his mother, which reproduces the poisoning scene. It works like magic, and the uncle shows he is as guilty as hell, and . . . oh, well, there's a good deal more talk and shilly-shallying before the final scene, in which the queen-mother is poisoned, Hamlet and Laertes kill each other, and Hamlet, at last, kills his uncle: a bloody, but, on the whole, a satisfactory conclusion. That's what happens in *Hamlet*.'

'Go and play marbles, child. You are still in the age of innocence; you know nothing. Let Professor Wilson teach you. There are more things in *Hamlet*, Eugenius, than are dreamt of in your simple mind; and if he had not written that book, we should still, all of us, have remained in abysmal ignorance of what Shakespeare was really driving at in that play which so many millions had read and seen acted for three hundred years.'

'He must be a very brainy fellow,' said Eugenius.

'He is. He is the lineal descendant of Theobald and Malone; the last fine-flowering of that school of thought which must be for ever seeking for variant readings, hidden meanings, and new interpretations. Shakespeare to them, and him, is not a poet to be enjoyed, but a riddle to be guessed, a knot to be unravelled. Show Professor Wilson a new reading and he is all agog to better it; hint at a difficulty, and he will rack his brains to solve it and propound another; suggest some hidden subtlety of meaning, and he will out-subtilise your most gossamer invention.

'Witness what he tells us of the inception of his book,' and I went across to the bookshelves and brought the volume back to the fire. 'It had its genesis (he tells us) in an article written as long ago as the year 1917, by Dr. Walter Wilson Greg in *The Modern Language Review*, and, as Professor

Wilson says, "no ordinary number" of that sober publication, "*for it opened with an article by you (Dr. Greg) that might have thrown any mind off its balance, an article ominously entitled 'Hamlet's Hallucination', in which you launched an attack upon the orthodox interpretation of the play, that for sheer audacity, close-knit reasoning and specious paralogism must be unique in the history of Shakespearean criticism*".

'Mehercle!' said Eugenius. 'It must have been some article. What are specious paralogisms, Yorick?'

'A paralogism is a false reasoning or, more strictly, an irrelevant reasoning, a reasoning beside the point. A specious one, I suppose, is one that looks as if it wasn't. Dr. Greg's article seems to have roused Professor Wilson's emulation, and almost envy, but when you have read his book, Eugenius, I think you will agree that he need not have been afraid.'

'I don't intend to read his book,' said Eugenius. 'You tell me what it is about and I'll tell you what I think about it. I suppose that's what you want really.' And he settled himself into his chair and lit a cigar.

'Dr. Greg's discovery (which so nearly threw Professor Wilson's mind off its balance) was in connection with the dumb-show in the Play-scene in *Hamlet* (Act III, Sc. 2). "Evidently," says Professor Wilson in his "Epistle Dedicatory" to Dr. Greg, "what started you off was a remarkable point in connection with the dumb-show in the Play-scene, which earlier critics seem to have almost completely ignored. *How comes it, you asked, that Claudius, who brings the Gonzago play to a sudden end 'upon the talk of poisoning', sits totally unmoved through the same scene when enacted in dumb-show a few minutes earlier?*"'

'But *does* he?' interrupted Eugenius. 'If I were acting him I shouldn't. I should let it be seen that I was wondering whether this was intentional or a horrid coincidence—and waiting to see—and holding myself in . . .'

'Hush, Eugenius. Never question a man's premises or there'd be an end of theories. Professor Wilson goes on:

The conclusions which you drew . . . were startling and at first blush overwhelming. Forgive me if I briefly summarise them for the sake of others: (1) The King does not blench



at the dumb-show for the simple reason that he does not recognise his own crime either in that or in the Gonzago play itself, which is a mere verbal repetition of it.

(2) The information which the Ghost gives to Hamlet is, therefore, an incorrect version of what took place.

(3) Consequently the Ghost's speech must be interpreted as nothing but a figment of Hamlet's overwrought brain.

(4) And, finally, the essential feature of the story (the poisoning through the ears of the victim) could only have taken root in Hamlet's mind through a subconscious memory of the very play which he afterwards employed "to catch the conscience of the King".

"This bald summary", concludes Professor Wilson, "does serious wrong to your brilliant exposition. A dozen 'buts' rise at once to the lips . . .", and he proceeds to enumerate a few.'

'D'you mean he took the Greg man seriously?' asked Eugenius, blowing smoke.

'Seriously, my dear Eugenius? As seriously as seventeen years of laborious research and intensive thought and a book of 334 pages octavo! He had bought the *Modern Language Review* to while away a railway journey in November 1917, and he goes on to say, "I must have read the article half a dozen times before reaching Sunderland, and from the first I realised that *I had been born to answer it*".'

"Oh, curséd spitel!" murmured Eugenius.

"At that time I knew no more about *Hamlet* than the average reader. But your theory raged 'like the hectic in my blood' . . ." and so forth. That, you observe, was in November 1917.'

'Well, did he answer it? How anybody could have taken it seriously at all I can't imagine; but, anyway, I shouldn't have thought it wanted much answering.'

'That's all you know about it. He did. He answered at first in the *Modern Language Review* for April 1918 and then in four articles in *The Athenæum*. By that time the Comus-Circe enchantment, that drug you have spoken of which seems to enter the veins of all Shakespearean commentators and dehumanise them and obscure their reason,

had got hold of him. His "elaborate essay" in *The Athenæum* "did not, however, touch upon the Ghost itself or Hamlet's doubts concerning it; and I began to take a course of reading in Elizabethan spiritualism in the hope of finding new light in that quarter".

'Is this real, Yorick, or are you making it up?' asked Eugenius, throwing his cigar-butt into the fire. "'Began to take a course in Elizabethan spiritualism in the hope of finding new light in that quarter"! It sounds like the man who blindfolded himself and went searching in a dark cupboard for a black cat that wasn't there.'

'All quite real and copied from the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Dr. Greg. Observe now the enchantment working. Professor Wilson goes on:

Yet the further I went in my investigations, the more the country seemed to open out. I became aware that the problems of the dumb-show and the Ghost were by no means the only puzzles in *Hamlet*; there were dozens of others. And I came to see that the scientific thing to do . . .'

'What's science got to do with it?' asked Eugenius, reaching in his pocket for his pipe.

'Don't blaspheme, Eugenius . . .

that the scientific thing to do was to attack all the problems at one and the same time, seeing that the solutions must hang together, if *Hamlet* was an artistic unity at all. . . .'

'If *what*?' asked Eugenius, sitting up suddenly. 'Stick that in italics, Yorick.'

'Don't interrupt. . . .

I was already gathering materials for this comprehensive attack in 1919 when the whole enterprise had to be laid aside . . . in deference to more urgent claims upon my scanty leisure. For in June of that year I was asked by the Syndics of Cambridge University Press to undertake an edition of the complete works of Shakespeare in collaboration with Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. . . . This digression . . . was deliberately accepted as an aid to the elucidation of *Hamlet*. Here was an opportunity of learning something about Shakespeare; and the more I could learn the better equipped I might hope to be for tackling *Hamlet* when the time came. . . .'

'*Kolossal!*' breathed Eugenius through a cloud of smoke, and when Eugenius uses the German language it is a sign that he is deeply moved.

I thought it well, therefore, to pause for a few minutes while I fetched the sherry and smoked a cigarette, still turning the pages of Professor Wilson's book. Eugenius drank sherry and smoked his pipe, watching me with a meditative eye.

'Why is sherry the only wine you can smoke with?' he asked, pouring himself a second glass.

The question being merely an affirmative statement, I said nothing.

'So he helped to edit the *Cambridge Shakespeare* in order to tackle *Hamlet* . . . or rather Greg, did he? Now, if I'd said that you'd have said it was my Oxford insolence, Yorick. Well, go on. What does he say next?'

'There is a good deal more of this sort of thing—for the "Epistle Dedicatory" occupies twenty-three pages—and it is interesting to read, for it provides the most perfect pathological study of the inception and progress of the disease *Morbus exegeticus* among Shakespearean commentators, and shows how insidiously the poison works. How, setting out to confute a thesis hardly worth the confutation, Professor Wilson himself gets his own feet entangled in the toils and emerges from the thicket bramble-clung with theses as thorny and perverse as that he set out to confute. How, honestly believing that he is shedding light, he is scattering darkness; and, convinced that he is clarifying, he but confounds confusion. He is quite honest about it. He lets you see the process clearly:

The process of discovery has been a thrilling adventure from which I have derived keen pleasure for many years; and I have endeavoured to set out the results in such a way that readers may share to some degree the excitement of the chase. For a chase it has been; and as one clue led on to another, the scent grew stronger and the huntsman more confident that he was on the right trail, until in the end he had run to earth—Shakespeare's own *Hamlet* as he conceives it to be! To the sleuth important clues are often provided by the most trivial details. And so it was

here. . . . You taught me that there was something odd about this dumb-show. I began asking my own questions about it, and these questions begot other questions . . . the upshot of all this was my first and in some ways my most delightful find, a comic under-plot in the Play-scene with the First Player as hero, or villain, of the piece.

Upon these naïve admissions by the patient any doctor could diagnose the disease. "A new theory about Shakespeare? Let's look at it. There's something in this! No, no, that won't do. Oh, I must answer this! I was born to answer this! Yes, I can go one better than this! Oh ho, here's a find! By gad, that's a notion! Yes, yes—that explains it! What about? Ah, but I can answer that all right. Yes, it must be that, or else my theory won't do!" And so on.

'Professor Wilson starts out to hunt with Greg and overrides the hounds. And, *and*, my dear Eugenius, he really believes that he has run to earth Shakespeare's own *Hamlet*!'

'Follows Greg's bag-fox and gets crossed by a badger more likely,' sniffed Eugenius. 'But does he refute Greg? What's all this about his "most delightful find" of a comic under-plot and the First Player the hero-villain?'

'Professor Wilson refutes his conclusions, but accepts his premises that Claudius isn't troubled by the dumb-show. Assuming this (a pure assumption and quite unnecessary and unwarranted), Greg's conclusion was that Claudius had *not* murdered his brother and that the Ghost was a liar and a false ghost. Professor Wilson's conclusion is that Claudius never saw the dumb-show! He would have saved himself a lot of trouble if he had simply denied the premiss; but then he couldn't have invented these new theories of his, or made "delightful finds". There would have been one article in the *Modern Language Review*, but none in *The Athenæum*—and no book. *You*, Eugenius, instantly denied or questioned the premiss, as, I think, most readers of the play would, and, as I admonished you, spoiled the whole game.'

'But *why* do they both say—Dr. Greg and Professor Wilson, I mean—that Claudius isn't troubled by the dumb-show? What is there in the play to show that he isn't?

'Simply the fact that he doesn't jump up at once after the dumb-shown and go off, but waits till the spoken words and actions of the players have confirmed his fears.

'In Chapter v, which he heads "The Multiple Mousetrap", Professor Wilson starts off by saying that "the Play-scene is the central point of *Hamlet*. . . . Yet it remains almost wholly unintelligible to the modern reader and playgoer". Then he proceeds . . .'

'But it doesn't,' objected Eugenius. 'I understand it all right, and I've never heard any playgoer say he didn't.'

'Of course it doesn't. Of course all the millions who have read and seen it acted are not fools. But Professor Wilson is of the blood of Malone, a Shakespeare sleuth. He must make difficulties in order to solve them . . . set up ninepins to knock them down. He then proceeds, as I was saying, to propound eleven queries, "six major and five minor", about the Play-scene, and prefaces them with this challenge (pp. 139-40):

I would ask those who think they understand the Play-scene to read over Shakespeare's pages again and then to find answers to the following questions.

Well, I am one who does think he understands the Play-scene, and I do assure Professor Wilson that I should have no difficulty whatever in answering those eleven questions—though most of them are hardly worth answering. But I will not trouble you with them, Eugenius, because it would take too long to demolish, one by one, the extraordinary arguments and deductions and conclusions Professor Wilson bases upon and draws from these imaginary difficulties, and I want to get on to . . .'

'Oh, let's have them, Yorick, and see if *I* can answer them *viva voce*, right off the reel.'

'Very well, Eugenius, if it amuses you. Here you are: Number 1. "*How is it that the players bring with them to Elsinore a drama which reproduces in minute detail all the circumstances of the King's crime?*"'

'Legitimate dramatic coincidence,' said Eugenius; 'and, besides, as a matter of fact they didn't. They had with them a repertory play, *The Murder of Gonzago*—no Elizabethan

company was ever without a couple of murder plays, and this one was just the sort of thing they would have, like *The Spanish Revenge* or *The Jew of Malta* or *Mullomolluco*—which was near enough; but *Hamlet* had to add a speech to make it more exact. Here, give me *Shakespeare* . . . yes, here you are:

HAMLET (to First-Player) . . . Dost thou hear me, old friend:  
can you play the Murder of Gonzago?

1ST PLAYER Ay, my Lord.

HAMLET We'll ha 't tomorrow night. You could, for a need,  
study a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines which I would  
set down and insert in 't? Could you not?

1ST PLAYER Ay, my Lord.

What's the matter with that? Seems natural enough to me, and well within stage credibility.'

'I agree. Here's Number 2: "*What is the dramatic purpose of the long conversation between Hamlet and the First Player immediately before the Play begins?*"'

'Which one? Oh, the one *immediately* before. Let's see. Well, the *dramatic* purpose, I suppose, is to let the audience know what's coming; but Shakespeare, I fancy, got carried away and couldn't resist the chance of unburdening his soul about actors who had ranted his lines and torn a passion to tatters and out-heroded Herod.

'I expect it had been rankling in his mind for a long time, and it was too good an opportunity to miss to set down his feelings once and for all in a play that would last for all time and be a perpetual lesson to them. It wasn't necessary to the action of the play, but that is quite sufficient explanation, it seems to me.'

'And to me. Here is Number 3: "*Why is the Play preceded by a dumb-show?*"'

'Because plays often were and the Elizabethan audiences liked them, I suppose, as they liked prologues and masques. Or, possibly, Hamlet had it in to make assurance doubly sure.

'Number 4: "*Why does not Claudius show any sign of discomfiture at the dumb-show?*"'

'We've answered that already,' said Eugenius. 'He *does*

if the actor who represents him knows his job. Villains, and especially if they are kings and versed in the arts of dissimulation and intrigue, are not easily caught napping. They know how to keep a straight face. It is part of their *métier* to be able not to betray emotion or give away their thoughts. Claudius would need some breaking down. He wouldn't flinch till the knife had been thrust home. Hence, perhaps, the extra dumb-show. He just manages to stick *that* out, but is clearly shaken by it. For when the "protestation scene" has been acted and the point been driven farther in, he turns to Hamlet with his question: "Have you heard the argument? Is there no offence in 't?'" Hamlet's answer and his description of the "Mouse-trap" and his jeer about galled jades make it clear, beyond hope, that Hamlet *knows*, and that this is a deliberate plot, and when for the *second time* the poison is poured into the sleeper's ear, even the hardened Claudius can stand no more.'

'That is the way, I fancy, Eugenius, that it has always been read, and always been acted, and always been accepted by the audience for three hundred years. It has been reserved for Dr. Greg and Professor Wilson to teach us better. Here is Number 5: "*What is Hamlet's object in making the murderer the nephew and not the brother of the King?*"'

'In the first place, Hamlet doesn't. It was so, apparently, in the old play *The Murder of Gonzago*. Hamlet didn't alter it, that's all. He probably thought it was near enough to show the King's guilt and that, if he were guilty, the nephew would carry a hint of threat to his guilty mind.'

'I agree. Here is Number 6: "*Why should the Courtiers, who know nothing of the real poisoning, assume later that Hamlet has behaved outrageously to his Uncle and even threatened him with death?*"'

'These questions are really too artificially absurd, Yorick,' said Eugenius. 'Professor Wilson is simply *trying* to raise difficulties, and he does not ~~even state~~ *state* them fairly. The answer shortly is: because the King told them so and because they are courtiers. Did you ever hear of a courtier who did not follow a king's lead? They assume it, you observe, *later*, when the King through Polonius and Rosen-

crantz and Guildenstern has put it about that he and the Queen have been grossly insulted and that Hamlet is mad—and dangerously mad. I do not find anywhere that the Courtiers assume that the Play-scene showed that Hamlet had “even threatened him with death” or, indeed, that he had ever threatened him with death at all. Even the King’s intimates Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and old Polonius don’t say a word about threats, at first, when they come to bid Hamlet to his mother. They only say that the King is angry and the Queen much disturbed. It is not till Scene 3 of this Act III, when the King gives the cue to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, that the suggestion that Hamlet is dangerous gets abroad. Up to then they only thought him rude about the marriage. It is the King who sets it afoot.

KING I like him not; *nor stands it safe with us*  
To let his madness range. . . .

When kings whisper this sort of thing it is quite enough.’

‘You are making the obvious answers, Eugenius, that I and, I fancy, every ordinarily intelligent reader of Shakespeare would make. But our ordinary intelligence is not good enough for Professor Wilson, for after propounding these “six major questions” he goes on: “A few minor points may be added by way of showing how far we are as yet from appreciating this, the most exciting episode in Shakespeare’s greatest drama.”’

‘*We?* Speak for yourself!’ said Eugenius, pouring more sherry. ‘Well, let’s have ’em.’

‘Here are the five “minor points”: I give you them all together.

*What is the exact significance of Hamlet’s “I eat the air, promise-crammed”?*

*Why does he lead Polonius on to speak of the assassination of Julius Caesar.*

*To whom and what does “miching mallecho” refer?*

*For what reason does Shakespeare introduce the Prologue with his ridiculous “jingling posy”?*

*Why does Hamlet preface the speech of the murderer with that extraordinary remark, “The croaking raven doth bellow for revenge”?’*



'I answered the first,' said Eugenius, 'when I was giving you a *résumé* of *Hamlet*. He is thrust out of his inheritance, a tame cat about the court, fed on vague promises of employment and advancement. As to the second, Hamlet *doesn't* "lead Polonius on". "*Miching mallecho*" refers to what Hamlet says it refers to—the murder about to be represented. As to the foolish Prologue, it is part of the ridicule Shakespeare permitted himself to indulge in of old popular plays and their fustian and their jingle. The "extraordinary remark" about the croaking raven is an impatient "prompt" by Hamlet to hurry the actor up. He doesn't remember the exact cue, so quotes the first murder cue out of some old ranting play that comes into his head. These questions are pettifogging.'

'They are extremely serious, Eugenius, for Professor Wilson thus concludes (p. 140):

Here are eleven queries about a scene of some 180 lines in length, and not a single one of them can be answered with any certainty on the accepted reading of the play.'

'Damn his impudence!' said Eugenius. 'I've just done it!'

'So you think, Eugenius, but wait a minute. He goes on:

Is Shakespeare therefore a bungler, a slipshod dramatist who leaves loose ends and banal obscurities thickly scattered over the central scene of his most famous drama? . . .'

'"*Mobléd Queen*" is good, "banal obscurities" is good,' murmured Eugenius. 'Go on.'

'There is too much of it to quote it all; but he concludes (p. 141):

And yet three centuries of spectators and readers have found no difficulty in swallowing the coincidence (of the murder play); they have been conscious of it, otherwise the Play-scene would have lost the last shred of its meaning, but they have seen nothing strange or incredible in it. In fact, the first critic to bring out the point clearly was Dr. W. W. Greg.'

'Hear you this Triton of the minnows! Mark you his absolute shall!' laughed Eugenius. 'But I don't suppose he

realises that he is calling some few million people fools. I mean I don't suppose he really means to be superior and contemptuous.'

'Of course he doesn't. I feel sure that Professor Dover Wilson is a most kindly and humble-minded person. It is the disease—the *Morbus exegeticus var. Shakespearianus*—which is to blame. You saw its insidious beginnings in that railway train on the way to Sunderland; you saw its incubation while he was writing his articles to the *Modern Language Review* and *The Athenæum*; and now, by the time he has reached p. 140 of the book, the thing has had him in its thrall for seventeen years and he is no more responsible than I was when bitten by the gadfly. His own theories have long displaced Greg's and "raged like the hectic in his blood", now quite past control. The "thrilling adventure" has carried him away, and he is bent on our sharing the "pleasures of the chase".'

'Like Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone,' said Eugenius. 'Only Bradley Headstone underwent grinding torments. Well, what was Professor Wilson's "most delightful find"? And having rejected Greg's "close-knit reasonings and specious paralogisms", what is *his* interpretation?'

'His most delightful find is that the First Player completely disobeys all Hamlet's injunctions and, besides ranting and raving, very nearly gives the whole show away much too soon by the dumb-show, which the First Player introduces contrary to Hamlet's express wish! Hence the *multiple* Mouse-trap and the First Player the villain of the piece. He says (p. 185):

The appearance of the dumb-show was exceedingly annoying to him (Hamlet), but annoyance gives place to consternation when he sees that the pantomime is likely to divulge the whole plot of the play before it even commences."

'What would it matter if it did? From Hamlet's point of view, I mean?' asked Eugenius. 'If the King showed his guilty conscience at the pantomime, well and good. What more would he need? If he didn't or managed to conceal his

rising fears, Hamlet still had the play and his interpolated speech as a second string to his bow.'

'That is how everybody, ante-Greg, so to speak, has read the scene. But Professor Wilson agrees with Dr. Greg's premiss—the *fons et origo* of the whole business—that the King shows no signs of perturbation at the dumb-show, and he must explain *why*. Dr. Greg says because the Ghost was a false ghost and the King's conscience was unguilty. Professor Wilson explains it by saying that the King never saw it!'

'Was the King blind, then?'

'Oh no. But very fortunately for Hamlet and the First Player (as interpreted by Professor Wilson) the King *and* the Queen *and* Polonius were all so busy talking to each other about Hamlet's madness, and whether it was plain madness (the King's theory) or love-induced madness (Polonius's theory), that they didn't see the dumb-show at all!'

'Given the premiss,' said Eugenius, 'Dr. Greg's solution is by far the more logical. But it is all mere midsummer madness. Is there a line or a word in the play to suggest that the King and the Queen and Polonius didn't see the dumb-show?'

'Not one. But Professor Wilson first suggests that there may have been stage directions which are lost:

We cannot therefore be certain how he arranged this stage business. But I am convinced that the foregoing comes near to his intentions.

And then proceeds to wrest Hamlet's side-chat with Ophelia to his views, thus:

He (Hamlet) glances anxiously at the King as the dumb-show proceeds, and observes, to his relief, that it has passed him by unnoticed. He fumes, however, at the stupidity of it all and when Ophelia asks him what it means he replies in an exasperated tone: "Marry, this is Miching mallecho, it means mischief." . . . As for mischief, there is mischief enough. The situation has been saved for the moment by the King's unwatchfulness; but what may not the Actors do next? For, as Hamlet guesses, there is worse behind. Yes, here comes a presenter who confirms his

blackest fears. He is on tenter-hooks. . . . "We shall know by this fellow," he cries in an anguished voice. [!] "The players cannot keep counsel, they'll tell all." But wondering Ophelia, all unwitting, cannot leave Hamlet alone. "Will a' tell us what this show means?" she persists, innocently touching him on the raw. "Aye—or any show that you will show him," retorts Hamlet savagely, [!] breaking out into ribaldry. . . . "You are naught, you are naught," she reproves, hurt though still gentle; "I'll mark the play." But master Presenter helps her not a whit towards the meaning of the show. To her surprise, Hamlet's joy, and the spectators' delighted amusement [!!!] he turns out to be—A Prologue! and his three silly lines of jingle still leave the cat in the bag. Hamlet is safe, and he relapses into jocularity. "Is this a prologue or the posy of a ring?" he enquires, with mingled feelings of intense relief and an outraged sense of dramatic propriety. . . .

Need I go on, Eugenius?"

'No,' said Eugenius. 'I have borne enough. It is past all whooping.'

'Professor Wilson naïvely comments upon this reconstruction of the Play-scene: "The subtlety of this is masterly in the extreme"' ('It is, but it isn't Shakespeare,' said Eugenius); "'but all the points would be readily grasped by the judicious among the audience if the dialogue were acted as Shakespeare intended it should be.'"

'That will do, Yorick, thank you. You can leave it at that. The King and Queen and Polonius conveniently blind and discussing Hamlet's madness—which they'd never had time to do before; Hamlet on tenter-hooks lest the King should see what he wanted him to see; his very plain chat with Ophelia endued with a sort of cryptic exasperation; and "miching mallecho" meaning—the mischief knows what. Your *Morbus* is a fell disease. Have you done with *What Happens in Hamlet*, or did Professor Wilson make many more happy discoveries or delightful finds?'

'Several. For instance, he says that "when Claudius asks Hamlet 'What do you call the play?' Hamlet raps out suddenly 'The Mouse-trap. Marry how? Trapically.' Hamlet knows the quarry is caught and he cannot resist the temptation to give vent to his glee, to cry 'marry trap' like a boy

who has won the game.” And then Professor Wilson adds this perfectly precious footnote: “‘Trapically’ is the reading of Q.1. and Q.2., and F.1. gives us ‘tropically’. But in the pronunciation of the time the two words were much alike, cf. G. D. Willcock, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan English*; cf. also note in my *Hamlet*.”

‘Marvellous!’ said Eugenius.

‘But the only other find I propose to discuss at length is that in Chapter iv, which is entitled “Antic Disposition”, and which deals with Hamlet’s simulated madness and, more particularly, with the one *real* difficulty (to ordinary minds) in the whole play of *Hamlet*, viz. Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia. In the years from 1917 to 1935 while Professor Wilson was pursuing the hare started by Dr. Greg and making use of his work on the Cambridge Edition “to learn something about Shakespeare”, he started other game, and the contribution he makes to the explaining of Hamlet’s brutal speeches to Ophelia is at least as subtle as his reconstruction of the Play-scene and perhaps the more valuable contribution towards our three-hundred-year-old lack of understanding of what Shakespeare intended *Hamlet* should be.

‘First of all, as to Hamlet’s madness. You and I, Eugenius, agree that no one, unless out of perversity or because he himself was mentally incapable, could ever possibly have supposed that Shakespeare intended us to believe that Hamlet was mad, or anywhere near it.

‘Nor are the reasons which induced Hamlet to simulate insanity at all difficult to see. In no other of his plays has Shakespeare taken such pains to make a character’s motives plain. A dozen of Hamlet’s speeches state them, repeat them, explain them, rub them in. A blind man could hardly miss them.

‘Yet though on these matters Professor Wilson is, in the main, orthodox enough, he still cannot resist playing a little with heresy. In discussing in this chapter what I should describe as Hamlet’s occasional display of somewhat hysterical emotion he continually hints and even goes near to saying that Hamlet was very near the edge of actual insanity.

He makes much play (pp. 90 and 91) with Hamlet's description of his own head as "this distracted globe" after the departure of his father's ghost, and describes him as "in a pitiable condition, beaten to the ground, distraught, half-paralysed", and so forth, and concludes: "In short, this passage of a hundred lines exhibits Hamlet in a state of extreme emotional instability" (so far so good, though I think "emotional stress" would have been better than "instability") "*and with an intellect tottering on its seat*". He goes on to say that his hysterical emotion was not due wholly to his father's apparition and disclosures (a thing to shake any son), for that he had twice before displayed signs of an "antic disposition". Both of these instances are completely negligible, but it is clear that the Professor is nibbling at the idea that perhaps Hamlet was mad after all—or as near as no matter—for he winds up thus (p. 99): "*In a word, Shakespeare wishes us to feel that Hamlet assumes madness because he cannot help it.*"

'Shakespeare does not wish us to do anything of the kind, as he has made Hamlet very clearly explain that he was going to "help it" whenever he liked, but I shall italicise this sentence when it gets into print because it seems to me to be one of the most remarkable sentences ever written, and the more I ponder upon it the more staggering it becomes.

'How a man can "assume" anything (unless, possibly, a pair of breeches at the pistol point) against his will I do not understand, and when it comes to *assuming* a character or mental attitude not your own *because you cannot help it*, the conception leaves me faint beyond pursuing.

'I should have thought it needed a very strong exercise of the will, and though I am no alienist, I should have supposed that the power to assume or simulate insanity would be about the strongest evidence of sanity that you could possibly find.

'In justice to Professor Wilson, however, I should tell you that he does not launch this portentous sentence without explanation, and this is how he explains it: Hamlet's intellect is "tottering on its seat", but Hamlet is aware of it and makes use of it! When the antic mood comes on "it

comes unsought, but is *welcomed* as affording relief . . . and is *accordingly purposely* elaborated and prolonged. Hamlet is conscious that he no longer retains perfect control over himself. *What more natural* than that *he should conceal his nervous breakdown behind a mask* which would enable him to *let himself go* when the fit is upon him?"

'The ingenuity of this leaves me spellbound. "*What more natural*"? What more natural than that a madman should be so sane as to make shrewd use of his insanity!

'Here we have a man who, when he feels the madness coming on him (an unusual though possible consciousness, I imagine), is so sanely aware of his own insanity that he can adopt it, regulate it, and direct it for his own purposes and at his own will! Here, I should have said, is evidence not of insanity but of a sort of super-sanity never before heard of.

'But in any case it will not do, for afterwards and throughout the play Hamlet puts on and discards his "antic disposition" at his will, and not merely when the mood compels him. Or are we to suppose that, by a series of miraculous coincidences, "the fit comes on" pat on each occasion when it is politic or necessary for him to hoodwink Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to fool Polonius, to mystify the King? Is it not clear as noonday that Hamlet is throughout so sane and so quick-witted that he can and does put on and off his simulated madness like a cloak, and that it is he who fools them, and not they him, to the top of his bent?'

'Yes, Professor Wilson has certainly drunk of Circe's cup,' said Eugenius sententiously. 'Thus does over-ingenuity lay snares for the foot of the over-ingenuous.'

'I must hurry now to Ophelia. Professor Wilson is perfectly right when he says (p. 101) that "the attitude of Hamlet towards Ophelia is without doubt the greatest of all the puzzles in the play".'

'I should have said myself that it was the *only* one—the only one, I mean, of any difficulty or importance—and long ago (long before 1917) I had thought out the best explanation I could of it. It is not a perfectly satisfactory one, I

admit, but I think it is better than Professor Wilson's, and I will say what it is presently.

'He says, very rightly (p. 103), that "the only possible defence for him (Hamlet) is to show that he had grounds" for what he did and said. I do not agree that he "treats Ophelia like a prostitute", but I agree that what he said was bad enough, and asks for a great deal of explaining or excuse.

'Professor Wilson's great discovery (or invention) is that the line of Polonius in Act II, Sc. 2, "At such a time I'll loose my daughter to him" was overheard by Hamlet.'

'What about it if it was?' said Eugenius. 'Though I don't see how he could have overheard it.'

'There is nothing new in the idea that Hamlet was conscious of the fact that when, in fact, Ophelia *was* "loosed to him" in Act III, Sc. 1, she had been deliberately sent to find out, if she could, what was the cause of his "antic disposition", and that those who had sent her were listening behind the arras or somewhere within earshot. Everybody has always thought so, and indeed later on (p. 131) Professor Wilson claims that his discovery (or, as he calls it now, "the restored entry (of Hamlet) at II. 2. 159", as if it was an established fact) "happily rids us of the traditional stage business of Polonius exposing himself (in the Nunnery scene) to the eye of Hamlet and the audience".

'That, I admit, is a clumsy device and I think unnecessary. I have always thought that Hamlet became aware of some noise or whispering or scuffling at the end of his great soliloquy, and that that is why he breaks it off suddenly—as he does—with: "Soft you now! The fair Ophelia . . ."

'It would be simple to let that appear without any "crude trick", but that would not suit Professor Wilson, because the sole reason why he insists that Hamlet must have overheard the plot in Act II, Sc. 2—*some hundreds of lines earlier*—is that he may make him hear that line "I'll loose my daughter to him" and instantly read into the meaning of the verb "loose" the vilest construction, and become convinced in a flash that Polonius is a pander and Ophelia a loose woman!'



'Does he seriously mean that?' asked Eugenius. 'This is curiouser and curiouser.'

'He does. The suggestion would be one to strain credulity in the case of any father and daughter. When you consider the character of Polonius and how careful he had been to instruct his daughter to repel advances, which he feared were not likely to lead to marriage, and when you consider the somewhat colourless innocence of Ophelia, the suggestion becomes merely wanton. The analogies Professor Wilson gives, from *The Tempest* and *The Merry Wives*, of a similar use of the verb "to loose to" do not bear out his argument and, indeed, the second textually contradicts it.

'That Hamlet, who, as Professor Wilson elsewhere insists, had been truly in love with Ophelia, should thus instantly leap to a vile construction of a word, in its ordinary sense perfectly harmless, and so tear love from his heart and thereupon treat the beloved like a . . . well, as Professor Wilson says he does treat her . . . is a hard thing to swallow, and, recognising this, Professor Wilson explains it in this way.

'He says (pp. 111-12) that on that occasion, described by Ophelia in Act II, Sc. 1, when Hamlet came to her "all unbraced . . . As if he had been loosed out of Hell to speak of Horrors", he came "for help and consolation" in his distress, but that "she has nothing for him". And so, after a long pause waiting for the help that never comes, he takes his leave:

At last, a little shaking of mine arm, . . .  
He raised a sigh so piteous and profound  
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk  
And end his being . . .

And so on to the end of that touching description. And then Professor Wilson concludes thus:

She fails; and the "piteous" sigh shows that he realises her failure and that all is over between them. She has rejected his love and proved unresponsive to an appeal of extreme need. *He is not yet suspicious of her; but the ground of his mind is ready for suspicion should the seed fall.*

You see? In the very next scene he overhears—or Professor Wilson makes him overhear—the fatal “loose her to him”, and instantly the seed is sown and suspicion sprouts and burgeons and love withers and dies more swiftly than Jonah’s gourd! So is Hamlet’s subsequent behaviour explained and excused.’

‘The suggestion is, to my mind,’ said Eugenius, ‘merely indecent. An insult to Polonius, to Ophelia, to Hamlet, to Shakespeare, and to you and me. Even Circe’s drug hardly excuses it.’

‘That is how, I think, most readers and lovers of Shakespeare would feel,’ I agreed. ‘There is something in the suggestion that Hamlet came to Ophelia on that occasion for comfort in his distress and was disappointed at receiving none, and he may have realised that she was not of the stuff of which heroines and helpmeets are made, as, poor girl, she certainly was not; but that would not have made him suspicious of her *virtue*, nor could it come within a hundred miles of explaining, and still less condoning, his subsequent language and conduct, especially in the viler sense in which Professor Wilson interprets them.

‘And even supposing the facts to have been as Professor Wilson states them, supposing, that is to say, that Hamlet’s love had been thus turned to loathing, how does he explain that last outburst of Hamlet in Act v, Sc. 1, when he leaps into Ophelia’s grave:

I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers  
Could not with all their quantity of love  
Make up my sum.

Is this the language of loathing or of love turned to hate? Or would Professor Wilson say that it was feigned? It rings true to me.’

‘And to me,’ said Eugenius; ‘and so Shakespeare meant it.’

‘Professor Wilson does not refer to this passage at all in his “Hamlet and Ophelia” chapter, whether purposely or not I cannot say. It should naturally have been mentioned there and explained, but it is not till p. 270, when he is

dealing with the Grave scene, that it seems to have occurred to him that without explanation it stands somewhat in the way of his cherished thesis, and he gets rid of the difficulty thus:

What more there is in it [i.e. Hamlet's "hysteric outburst" when he leaps into the grave] is not love for Ophelia . . . *that had been dead and buried long before she was . . . but self-reproach that love is absent*: he is careful to say "I loved Ophelia". The outburst makes a fine scene, however, *and the excitement of it no doubt brings him pleasure.*

What kind of a creature does he thus make Hamlet out to be? And why, if love is killed and long dead and buried by the gross conduct of the once-beloved, showing that she never deserved love, was never in fact what he thought she was, so that his love was given to a non-existent being, *why* should there be any "self-reproach that love is absent"?

'Worst and weakest of all is the plea "he is careful to say 'I loved Ophelia'—and not 'I love'." "*Careful*" in the midst of an "hysteric outburst"? And as for the tense of the verb to love, what tense, I wonder, does Professor Wilson use, in speech or thought, when he stands by the grave of a dead friend and drops regretful earth upon the coffin-lid?

'The assumptions, the reasoning, the deductions are all unfounded and false from beginning to end; but it is instructive to see to what desperate straits of reasoning an intelligent man may be brought in defence or support of a cherished hypothesis.'

'Let this be a lesson to us, Yorick!' said Eugenius. 'And now, tell me, what is *your* explanation of or excuse for Hamlet's words and conduct to Ophelia?'

'The only explanation I have been able to find (and I admit it is not wholly adequate) is this: when he came to her on that occasion "as if from Hell", he came partly perhaps for consolation, *but chiefly for renunciation.*

'After his father's dread disclosure, after the oath that he had sworn, he knew he was no more for love and marriage and the happiness of children. He knew he was a man unhappy, doomed, consecrate to revenge; and that when his horrid mission was accomplished he must die, or, if he

still lived, must live a man branded and apart. He could not ask the child Ophelia to share that destiny with him, and so he went to her to renounce love, to tell her that it could not be, to say good-bye. And then his fatal incapacity for action seized him; he could not screw his courage to the sticking-point, and failing to say farewell with his lips, he tried to say it with his eyes. Of course Ophelia did not understand—how should she?—and so all was to do again. But Hamlet never could do it outright and so, as I conceive, foolishly, absurdly, but I think quite in consonance with his character as Shakespeare drew him, he set himself *to kill her love for him*. Thus, he thought, he would inflict the lesser pain.'

'M'yes, it's an explanation,' agreed Eugenius, 'but I seem to remember that Q. gives a different one in his *Shakespeare's Workmanship*.'

'He does. He says that Shakespeare (as is generally agreed) took the story of *Hamlet* from de Belleforest's historical novel, and that in that original the Ophelia of the story "*was a courtesan, though a kind-hearted one*". He goes on: "Shakespeare, in his great wisdom, preferred to replace this experienced lady by the innocent Ophelia. This he did very wisely; but I hold that, being an indolent man, he failed to remove or to recast some sentences which, cruel enough even when spoken to a woman of easy virtue, are intolerable when cast at Ophelia."

'I don't like this explanation, Eugenius, though I'm glad to see that Q. agrees with us that Shakespeare was an indolent and careless man. But he wasn't as careless as all that!'

'He wasn't careless when it really mattered,' said Eugenius, 'and here it did matter, damnably. Besides, it makes him too much a copyist. No; I prefer your explanation.'

'Thank you, Eugenius. Take it for what it is worth. I do not say it excuses him or even wholly explains, but it is at least some sort of explanation—and it is the only one which will not make his burst of grief in Ophelia's grave a sorry farce, which I will never believe Shakespeare intended it to be. If it does not wholly absolve Hamlet, it leaves him less a knave than Professor Wilson's, which strangely seems

the more it tries to excuse Hamlet the more to blacken him. For, not content with making him leap to the worst construction of one harmless verb, he, throughout his comments on the Nunnery scene (pp. 125-36), makes all Hamlet's coarse and brutal words carry a worser meaning than it is absolutely necessary to give them, and insists finally (supporting his insistence again by references) that when he repeatedly tells her to go to a nunnery, he means by "nunnery" a "house of ill-fame".

'This passes all bearing!' said Eugenius angrily. 'Must he make Ophelia be called a whore and Hamlet speak and act like a cad to support his delightful finds, confound the man?'

'It is purely wanton, I agree, and rather damnable,' I said. 'Hamlet was, after all, a gentleman in the Elizabethan sense of the word, and though he might conceive the foolish idea of blackening himself in Ophelia's eyes to kill her love, there are limits beyond which he would not go. As to the foolishness of the idea, I would only point out that it has been used pretty frequently in plays and novels; and the fact that the average playgoer is ready to swallow it and find it noble and touching is evidenced by the continued success of that version of *David Garrick* in which Charles Wyndham not so very many years ago used to draw tears of sympathy and understanding from successive and admiring audiences.'

'I can give you better support than David Garrick for your theory, Yorick,' said Eugenius. 'Have you forgotten what your pet Charles Lamb says on the subject?'

'What does he say? I don't remember.'

'Oho!' said Eugenius. 'Have I again to teach you your letters?' He got up and went to the bookcase for Lamb, and turning the pages, found the passage. 'He says, speaking of Hamlet's rudenesses to Polonius and his treatment of Ophelia, this:

... that soreness of mind which makes him treat the intrusions of Polonius with harshness and the asperity *which he puts on* in his interview with Ophelia. These tokens of an unhinged mind (*if they be not mixed in the latter case with a profound artifice of*

*love to alienate Ophelia by affected discourtesies, so to prepare her mind for the breaking off of that loving intercourse which can no longer find a place amidst business so serious as that which he had to do)* are parts of his character which . . .

There you are, Yorick: you have only cribbed from Lamb. You must have had that passage in your mind when you made your notes.'

'I must have read it, of course,' I agreed, 'but I'd clean forgotten it, though it may have been present in my mind subconsciously.'

'I never thought to hear you use that word, Yorick!' said Eugenius, laughing.

'Oh, it has its uses. Well, Eugenius, I don't think we need discuss Professor Wilson's book any more. Wait a minute. There is one more delightful find I *must* regale you with.' I searched the book again. 'Here you are, on p. 127 (and elsewhere in his book, for he is proud of the emendation) he gives the line "O that this too too solid flesh would melt" as "O that this too too *sullied* flesh would melt", and thus quotes it as an introduction to this piece of profound interpretation of the great soliloquy:

But he is no longer thinking of his own "sullied flesh", still less of the divine command. By constantly turning it over he has worn the problem to the bone :

"To be or not to be, that is the question."

A like expression of utter weariness is not to be found in the rest of human literature. . . .'

'Bosh!' interjected Eugenius.

'Be quiet and listen . . .

Sleep, death, annihilation, his whole mind is concentrated upon these; and the only thing that holds his arm from striking home with "the bare bodkin" is the thought of "what dreams may come"; "the dread of something after death". For he is without the consolation of Lucretius. He believes in immortality, which means that by death he may exchange one nightmare for a worse. Eternity has him in a trap, which dwarfs the little traps of Claudius and Polonius to nothingness. No one but Shakespeare could have interrupted an exciting dramatic intrigue with a passage like this. The surprise and the audacity of it take our breath away, and render the pity of it the more overwhelming.

'It is a strange passage, Eugenius, apart from its highfalutin' "*without the consolation of Lucretius*". A Christian contemplating death! For Hamlet was a Christian, as Shakespeare was.'

'It's the "sullied" flesh sticks in my throat,' said Eugenius. 'It is even worse than "trapically"'. Why does he do it, Yorick?'

'They are horses from the same stable, Eugenius. Professor Wilson must have been consorting with people who use what Mr. St. John Ervine (who himself, I'm told, uses Ulster-Scots) insists on calling "the Oxford accent". Of course, it isn't anything of the kind. You come across it sometimes in Oxford, but also in the most unacademic places. It is the top-of-the-throat accent; the parsonic accent. "Trapically" for "tropically". "Sullied" for "solid". They come from the same palate.'

'Perhaps it is the authentic Cambridge accent,' said Eugenius, with what he says I call his usual Oxford insolence. 'D'you know, Yorick,' he went on, 'I don't think a man who can invent and glory in "emendations" of that sort ought to be allowed even to read Shakespeare, much less help to edit him. It isn't safe.'

'Oh, I expect Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch kept him strictly to the job over the editing and barred "sleuthing",' I said. 'And, as a matter of fact, it is a very good edition.'

'It certainly is,' agreed Eugenius, 'and I withdraw my last remark. But I am sure that Q. himself would have agreed with us about Professor Wilson's book and his "discoveries". Hear what he says in his talks on *Hamlet*,' and Eugenius picked up *Shakespeare's Workmanship* and read:

I suggest that all those critics too (Coleridge, Goethe, Klein, Werder, and the rest) have been plucking different hearts out of the mystery and exhibiting them, *simply because there was never any mystery in "Hamlet", and consequently no secret heart to pluck out.*

And he supports this statement with what he calls "*a monumental principle of all great art*", namely, that:

it is never a test of the highest art that it is unintelligible. It is rather the last triumph of a masterpiece—the triumph definitely passing it for a classic—that all men in their degree can understand and enjoy it . . .

which is pretty well what you've been saying for the last hour or so.'

'Quite so. I happen to know that that is very much what Q. did think about the book.'

'Well,' said Eugenius, 'we've had a long sitting and here's another chapter done. Only two more you say, Yorick? Hurrah! Lift up your hearts, O our readers! Oh, but mine needs lifting up—for things are not going well in Europe. I am very sad to-day.'

'Yes. It seems absurd to be writing books on Shakespeare.'

'Oh, I don't know. I expect Shakespeare would have gone on writing—like Drake playing bowls.'

'No, he wouldn't, Eugenius; he'd have gone to sea again! I wish I could. Or to Norway. I hope it isn't true about Norway; I won't believe it yet.'

Yet summer in the haunch of Winter sings  
The lifting up of day.

'Did you say that, Yorick?' asked Eugenius, looking up suddenly.

'No; did you?'

'No. Your isle is full of voices, Yorick.'



## Chapter XI

### THE REAL SHAKESPEARE

FALSTAFF . . . *A good sherris-sack hath a twofold operation in it. It ascends me into the brain; dries me there all the foolish, dull and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery and delectable shapes; which, delivered o'er to the voice—the tongue—which is the birth, becomes excellent wit.*

*The second property of your excellent sherris is, the warming of the blood; which, before cold and settled, left the liver white and pale, which is the badge of pusillanimity and cowardice; but the sherris warms it and makes it course from the inwards to the parts extreme; . . . So that skill in the weapon is nothing without sack, for that sets it a-work; and learning, a mere hoard of gold kept by a devil, till sack commences it and sets it in act and use. Hereof comes it that Prince Harry is valiant; for the cold blood he did naturally inherit of his father, he hath, like lean, sterile and bare land, manured, husbanded and tilled, with excellent endeavour of drinking good, and good store of, fertile sherris, that he is become very hot and valiant. If I had a thousand sons, the first human principle I would teach them should be,—to forswear thin potations, and to addict themselves to sack.*

HENRY IV, PART 2, ACT IV, SC. 3

ARCHBP. OF CANTERBURY *The courses of his youth promised it not. . . .*

*Consideration, like an angel, came  
And whipped the offending Adam out of him,  
Leaving his body as a paradise,  
To envelop and contain celestial spirits. . . .  
Hear him but reason in divinity,  
And, all admiring, with an inward wish,  
You would desire the king were made a prelate;  
Hear him debate of commonwealth affairs,  
You would say it hath been all-in-all his study;  
List his discourse of war, and you shall hear  
A fearful battle rendered you in music;  
Turn him to any course of policy,  
The Gordian Knot of it he will unloose,  
Familiar as his garter;—that, when he speaks,*

## THE REAL SHAKESPEARE

*The air, a charter'd libertine, is still  
And the mute wonder lurketh in men's ears  
To steal his sweet and honeyed sentences; . . .  
Which is a wonder how his grace should glean it,  
Seeing his addiction was to courses vain;  
His companies unletter'd, rude and shallow; . . .  
And never noted in him any study,  
Any retirement, any sequestration  
From open haunts and popularity.*

HENRY V, ACT I, SC.

'Don't you think, Yorick,' said Eugenius, 'that we ought to have a chapter in which we set out positively our idea of the real Shakespeare? Otherwise they may say that our criticism is merely destructive and that we have nothing to offer worthy of worship in exchange for the idol we have de-pedestalled. Or even (perish the thought!) that we do not love Shakespeare.'

'By all means,' I said; 'though I think we have let our idea of what he really is appear pretty clearly. I am no iconoclast except of false icons, and short of blind adoration—this side idolatry, as Ben Jonson said—nobody has ever loved Shakespeare more than I. Only I worship reasonably and do not go beyond *hyperdulia*. Let us then come out into the garden and pick apples.'

'In May?'

'Why not? Imaginary apples, Hesperidean apples, Shakespearean apples. You surely are not so dull-witted, my dear Eugenius, as that pedagogue whom I heard the other day objecting down his nose (on grounds of moral honesty and truth) to the children's game of "Nuts in May"?''

'What did the fool say?'

'He said that you couldn't gather nuts in May, and that such games and fairy-stories inculcated a habit of lying or at least a disregard for Truth and the immutable Laws of Nature.'

'Dear me,' said Eugenius. 'What a sea-green incorruptible. Yes, let us come out into your garden and pick Shakespeare's apples.'

So we took chairs out into the little, old sloping garden

that is shut in by hawthorn hedges, and set them under the old apple-tree. It is a very old apple-tree, a Blenheim Orange, planted soon after the house was built nearly three hundred years ago; but it still bears loads of apples, and its gnarled branches were now white-and-warm with blossom. A little wind stirred in the hedges and brought the scent of hawthorn, not too strong yet, for it was only mid-May and a late spring.

The same little wind every now and then brought down fluttering petals on our heads and shoulders—'drop of blood and foam-dapple'—and on the grass. Thrushes were singing everywhere and a disturbed blackbird went over the hedge with his angry imitation of a cock-pheasant. Everything was absolutely perfect.

We filled our pipes and smoked and looked up at the sky through that delicate-gorgeous canopy. The tree was nearly all blossom; the leaf-buds were hardly unfurled.

'This beats Cleopatra's barge,' said Eugenius, and he repeated gently Gerard Hopkins' lines:

'When drop-of-blood-and-foam-dapple  
Bloom lights the orchard apple  
And thicket and thorp are merry  
With silver-surfd cherry  
And azuring-over greybell makes  
Wood banks and brakes washwet like lakes  
And magic cuckoo call  
Caps, clears and clinches all . . .'

'You'll hear him presently,' I said. 'Those are lovely lines. As to Cleopatra's barge, I never thought much of it. Too much perfumery. I like Gratiano's "scarfd bark" better. That one adjective paints a picture for me more alive and dancing than all the beaten gold and purple sails of the barge. I could discourse on the economy of adjectives for an hour by Shrewsbury clock.'

'Do,' said Eugenius. 'I'm quite happy. I needn't listen.'

'I won't. What I really wanted to say was that, when apple-blossom-time comes round I always think and say it is the loveliest flower in the world. And then when, a little

after, the great flag-irises are full out, I say that no flower can touch their standards and their falls for beauty. And then wild roses laugh at me from the tangled hedges, and I swear that the curve and flush and scent of their simple petals are loveliest of all.

'It is the same when I canoe my rivers. When I am on Usk I swear to her eternal vows; yet, a month later, Wye (like Chloe) is my real flame; and presently—frailty, thy name is Yorick—the face of Eden blots out their memory.'

Eugenius took his pipe out of his mouth and declaimed:

'Paris a crimson-damask rose  
Once twined in Helen's hair,  
And swore no other flower that blows  
Should ever harbour there.  
But she, next day, in his despite  
Wreathed lilies there instead;  
When straight he swore that only white  
Could grace so dear a head.'

'Very neat and Herrickian. Where does that come from?' I asked.

'It's something I wrote myself once,' said Eugenius demurely, 'to my then best girl. Her name, you see, was Helen.'

'Oh, I see all right. But I gather, my dear Paris, that in the end her face did not launch a thousand ships and burn the topless towers of Ilium?'

Eugenius disdained to reply directly.

'The reason I quoted those lines,' he said, 'was that they seemed to me, when coupled with your remarks about the beauty of the moment and the inconstancy of man, to be a good text on which to start our picking of Shakespeare's apples. When I'm asked what I like best or think most beautiful about anything, whether it is a poet's poems or a playwright's plays or a novelist's novels or the flowers in the garden, I groan in spirit. You know those sort of questions: "If all books but half a dozen were to be destroyed, which six would you save from the burning?" When anybody asks that sort of . . . of . . .'

'Otiose and superfluous?'

'Thank you, Yorick . . . otiose and superfluous question, I refuse to answer.'

'The right answer would be that you would kill the incendiary before he could put his torch to the pile.'

'They wouldn't take that for an answer.'

'It isn't one, of course; and they are a literal folk. But what you are driving at, I suppose, Eugenius, is—that if you were to ask *me* what of all Shakespeare's works I should clutch to my heart and plunge with through the flames that were spouting from the British Museum or the Bodleian, how should I answer?'

'It would give us a starting-point for discussion. How *would* you answer?'

'Of the plays you mean, I hope? Not the Sonnets? You must give me them as being, somehow, safe. You must. Otherwise my case would be harder than that of the mother of the live child before Solomon.'

'Very well, then; out of the plays alone. I'll give you time to think.'

'I do not need a moment,' I said. 'For I know I should snatch one little volume in which were collected all the lyrics from all the plays (I forget whose is the best edition), and if I leaped with it from the top-floor window (I suppose the Museum has a top floor), I am sure it would bear me up!'

'You got out of that fairly well,' smiled Eugenius. 'And now we can argue. You really think that the lyrics are worth more than the plays, or at least, if you had them and the Sonnets, you could bear to let the plays go?'

'Oh no. I couldn't *bear* it. I should certainly never smile again. And I don't mean that the lyrics are worth more than the plays, or that anything is worth more than anything else. I am not an economist or a money-changer. I only mean that, if that horrid test were applied to me, that is what I should blindly do—my heart bidding, I dare say, more than my head. And that, I imagine, is what you wanted to know.'

'I wonder how many Shakespeare lovers would do the same,' mused Eugenius.

'Quite a lot, I think,' I said. 'And though heart more than head may prompt us (as I have confessed), I could give some reasons at least for the choice.'

'As, for instance?'

'Well, first of all because, after the Sonnets, the lyrics are the most spontaneous and natural expression of the human Shakespeare, of Shakespeare the lover and the poet; and, even before the Sonnets, they are the most perfect expression of his natural singing voice.'

'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo?' murmured Eugenius. 'And you would sacrifice the subtlety of *Hamlet* and the inexorability of *Macbeth* and the tears of *Lear* to that fellow—that ousel-cock so black of hue with orange-tawny bill—who is whistling to us from over the hedge there?'

'You don't mean that, Eugenius, and you know I wouldn't. It only shows how more than otiose and futile such questions are. Yet, now that I have begun to try to justify my heart-instinct, let me go on, though I know I shall be recanting every time you turn the rack.'

'I want to know *why* you think there is more of the essential Shakespeare in the Sonnets and lyrics than in the plays?' persisted Eugenius.

'I don't think I said "essential". I don't quite know what "essential" means, except that it generally begs the question. But my reason is, as regards the Sonnets, that he began to write them *for himself*, before he became harnessed to play-writing; and, as regards the lyrics, that after he became so harnessed they were the one thing about which he was always absolutely free to write as he chose. Even to the end of his play-writing, though not writing as strictly to order as at first, he was yet only given a larger choice, a wider discretion. He was still bound. But he could always, from first to last, break out into song as he pleased and sing at heaven's gate unfettered; he could scatter his lyrics as he chose; and he did—he scattered them like this apple-blossom falling on the grass.

'Yet see, Eugenius, how futile all this is. "Essential"? What is the essential Shakespeare or the essential anybody?

Others will say that the essential Shakespeare is the Shakespeare of thought and of human nature and of a Great Spirit brooding on things to come, and so forth. And if I reply that there is plenty of thought in the Sonnets and that in the lyrics there is plenty of human nature, as well as nature of the woods and fields, that will not satisfy them—nor does it satisfy myself. The truth is, we want to keep them all. I recant. I must have the plays as well, for I could not be without Macbeth's "She should have died hereafter . . ." and the rest of it; nor Isabella's plea for mercy—so much better than Portia's:

. . . Alas! Alas!

Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once;  
And He that might the vantage best have took  
Found out the remedy. How would you be  
If He, Who is the top of judgement, should  
But judge you as you are?—O think on that;  
And Mercy then will breathe within your lips  
Like man new made.

'No; nor Bassanio's "Only my blood speaks to you in my veins"; nor Romeo's:

Night's candles are burnt out and jocund day  
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.

Nor Imogen's simple "How should I be revenged?" nor her pitiful "Why, I must die . . ." Nor Richard II's:

All murdered:—for within the hollow crown  
That rounds the mortal temples of a King  
Keeps Death his court; . . .

Nor Lorenzo and Jessica; nor Falstaff and Sir Toby Belch; nor Audrey and Touchstone; nor Christopher Sly; nor Puck and the Fairies of Titania; nor Ariel with cowslip bell; nor Launce and his dog Crab; nor that "little touch of Harry in the night"; nor the Fool in *Lear*—ah! And I picked up the copy of *Shakespeare* I had brought out into the garden and it opened at the place, and I read:

. . . Her voice was ever soft,  
Gentle and low,—an excellent thing in woman.  
I killed the slave that was a-hanging thee . . .

and so to the end:

And my poor fool is hanged! No, no, no Life!  
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life  
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more  
 Never, never, never, never, never!—  
 Pray you undo this button;—thank you Sir  
 Do you see this?—Look on her,—look,—her lips,—  
 Look there, look there!’

‘I wish you wouldn’t, Yorick,’ said Eugenius, and got up.

‘I’m sorry. I won’t quote anything else.’

‘There isn’t anything else—after *that*,’ he said; ‘but it isn’t right you know, Yorick, on a May morning.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said again. ‘I had meant to stick to the lyrics. No, it isn’t the right note for a May morning. Let us go back to them and talk of darling buds. By the way, did Shakespeare ever use the word “darling” anywhere else except in that sonnet?’

‘I can’t think of one at the moment,’ said Eugenius. ‘Ask the question in the Examination Paper. It isn’t a word I’m fond of, anyway, and I shouldn’t think he’d use it much.’

We sat down again and filled our pipes. The thrushes went on singing, and I picked up the book where I had dropped it among the petals, and turned the pages.

‘Let us go through the lyrics,’ I said presently. ‘I think I’m going to re-recant (like Cranmer) and special-plead for them again.’

‘There *is* something to be said for the plea that what a man writes spontaneously, just out of himself as a bird sings, is more really him (or is it “he”?) than anything else he writes. Only now I must have *one* play as well. I must have *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, because he wrote that too to please himself. He wrote that, I am quite sure, before he had got his foot in with Henslowe or with the company: before he was harnessed; while he was still very young and a little Lylyish and in love with love and with “conceits”. You will observe that it is more merely poetic—can one say *merely* poetic?—than any other play he wrote afterwards: even than *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

‘It is a Provençal play straight out of one of René’s



Courts of Love. It was written in his early Sonnet period, soon after *Venus* and *Lucrece*. There is a sonnet in it, as you remember. Listen to it:

Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye,—  
 'Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument,—  
 Persuade my heart to this false perjury?  
 Vows for thee broke deserve not punishment.  
 A woman I forswore; but I will prove,  
 Thou being a goddess, I forswore not thee;  
 My vow was earthly, thou a heavenly love;  
 Thy grace being gain'd cures all disgrace in me.  
 Vows are but breath, and breath a vapour is:  
 Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine,  
 Exhal'st this vapour vow; in thee it is:  
 If broken, then it is no fault of mine;  
 If by me broke, what fool is not so wise  
 To lose an oath to win a paradise?'

'“His honour rooted in dishonour stood, and faith unfaithful kept him falsely true”—there is the germ of most other people's good verse in Shakespeare,' said Eugenius; 'but isn't there another sonnet just before?'

'No. The King's is just lovers' commonplace about roses and dew and silver moons, and so forth. Kings are allowed to write anything and it will pass. But Longaville had to write a sonnet, and a good one, too. There are not twenty better in the whole collection. I might argue from it and them that it helps to prove that Shakespeare did not “develop” quite so much as the commentators like to believe (because it gives them the opportunity of pointing to him as a rising curve in a chart set out on a blackboard), but was pretty well all there from the beginning.

'And, arguing from “internal evidence”, that sonnet ought to be enough both to date the play and prove that Shakespeare wrote it.'

'Oh no, Yorick; for they could say that he wrote the sonnet but that someone else wrote the play—or all the bad lines in it, anyway. Yes, it is a good sonnet. I wish Biron hadn't torn up what he had written to Rosaline. It was probably an even better one, for Biron was clearly the poet of the company.'

'I expect Shakespeare wasn't satisfied with it, and it was really he who tore it up,' I said. 'After all, he gave Biron most of the good lines in the play—a sure evidence (I still insist despite your murderers) that he loved him. The play is full of poetry, but he has the best of it. Witness almost his first speech, which has the line: "Light, seeking light, doth light of light beguile", and almost his last:

To move wild laughter in the throat of death!

It cannot be: it is impossible:

Mirth cannot move a soul in agony.

But, best of all, his long apologia for love at the end of Act iv. It is the young Shakespeare himself speaking, still in love with love, though he had left three children behind him at Stratford.' I picked up the book again and read:

'But love first learned in a lady's eyes,  
Lives not alone immured in the brain,  
But, with the motion of all elements,  
Courses as swift as thought in every power,  
And gives to every power a double power  
Above their functions and their offices.  
It adds a precious seeing to the eye;  
A lover's eyes will gaze an eagle blind;  
A lover's ear will hear the lowest sound; . . .  
Love's feeling is more soft and sensible  
Than are the tender horns of cockled snails; . . .

'Is not that the authentic voice of Shakespeare? Could anyone else have written it but he? Especially the last two lines, "the tender horns of cockled snails". It almost makes me want to rescue that one from the brutal thrush who is breaking it over there on his thrush's-stone.'

'Why don't you?' asked Eugenius.

'Because I didn't mean it. As a matter of fact, I put the snail there myself; I often do. I like thrushes better than snails, you see. It was only a passing sentimentality.'

'Sentimentality is dangerous, Yorick,' said Eugenius, and quoted:

'I sits with my feet in a brook  
And if anyone asks me for why  
I hits 'em a hit with my crook  
And "'Tis Sentiment kills me!'" says I.'

'In literature, I grant you; but in life I rather like it—once in a way.' I said. 'Where do those lines come from, Eugenius? It is years since I heard them. I remember that my father was fond of quoting them, but I never knew whence they came.'

'I can't remember,' said Eugenius. 'Was it Horace Walpole? In his letters somewhere? But what has all this got to do with the really real Shakespeare?'

'Nothing. Except that Shakespeare was himself sometimes inclined to be sentimental. He was very fond, for instance, of the simple, naïve, sentimental idea of the love-sick girl disguising herself as a boy and following her love over land and sea.'

'It is a device prehistoric, as old as man—or woman—and will endure for ever,' said Eugenius sententiously. 'Ages before Shakespeare was born it was used in the first play acted by the cave-men (after men and women began to wear distinguishing clothes, of course); and when the New Zealander rises to stretch his fingers, cramped by sketching the broken arch of London Bridge, he will find that a maid, dressed in the breeches or other male garb of the period, has followed him in his wanderings and has been looking over his shoulder.'

'Precisely. But you will observe that Shakespeare used this age-old device over and over again. Half of his heroines do it. Julia (of *Verona*), Viola (of *Twelfth Night*), Rosalind (of *As You Like It*), Imogen (of *Cymbeline*), Portia and Nerissa (of *The Merchant*), though that was for a different purpose; but Jessica put on "the lovely garnish of a boy" for love—they all do it. Shakespeare was never tired of it. Which shows that he was always young at heart, always in love with love, and always—what do you think?—a little touched with sentiment. It also shows that he did not change very much, nor indulge in psychological metamorphoses, but was, all the time and to the end, very much of the same simple, equable, serene, and all-understanding spirit as he was at the beginning. It was just touch-and-go that he didn't put Miranda into breeches. If Ferdinand had left her on

the island as Theseus did Ariadne, she would have been after him in doublet and hose like a shot.'

'Sentiment, yes,' said Eugenius (disregarding my flippancy about *The Tempest*, that play of "profound disillusionment" and "weariness of life"), 'but not *sentimentality*. Sentimentality was a growth of the eighteenth century: brought to perfection by Sterne and sinking away into the sand with Mackenzie: revived in the nineteenth century divested of powder and patches, and therefore even more difficult to handle successfully.'

'I knew you, of course, for a Laurentian, Eugenius,' I said, 'but I had not known you for such an expert on sentiment. Discourse to me further.'

'Sentiment,' said Eugenius, hitching an imaginary gown upon his shoulders, 'is the most difficult thing to achieve in literature, whether in verse or prose. Far more often and more easily than vaulting ambition it o'erleaps itself and falls on t'other side. It calls for the nicest, the most delicate handling. Its perfections are more coy and virginal than the bloom on plums. To achieve them you have to be as gossamer as Queen Mab and as accurate-gentle as a butterfly lighting on a flower. The least false emphasis, the smallest over-insistence and you are lost.

'I am speaking now of the highest form of sentiment, its fine-flower. It is very rare. You will find it embalmed here and there in the Greek Anthology; it appears again in the *Song of Roland* and in some of the early French *fabliaux*, like *Aucassin and Nicolette* (but never again after that in French literature); it is to be heard here and there in Shakespeare's plays, as in the swoon of Imogen and (but here descending to a lower level) in the Forest of Arden and in the wooing of Perdita; we are going to hear it in some of Shakespeare's lyrics; and—and I don't think we shall ever get any more of it till the end of the world . . .' Eugenius paused. 'This lecturing is thirsty work,' he said.

'Go on; I don't mind taking the course,' I said, and hitching his gown again, he resumed.

'I do not find it in the Caroline poets, even in their pastorals; it is not to be found in the Restoration comedies,

nor anywhere (I think) in Dryden; and when it does emerge again it has fallen to a lower level: it has left the Forest of Arden and the Fields of Illyria, and is now patched and powdered and has become *sentimentality*. In poetry Pope's *Rape of the Lock* is its most perfect expression, and in prose Sterne its sole master.

'It lingered on to nearly the end of the eighteenth century, becoming more and more artificial and anæmic, and died (I think) with Lydia Languish.

'Curious (and, I think, over-subtle) observers might find a sort of sadist sentimentality in some of the literature of the French Revolution, a rather horrible variety towards which English sentimentality has never had any leaning. Our sentimentality emerges again in the early nineteenth century, and so far as verse is concerned, full-fledged and sweetly-tearful in Thomas Moore, the young Catullus of his time, as . . .'

'A gross libel on Catullus,' I objected.

'I was going to say so. He wasn't a bit like Catullus. Byron, I think, only meant to be complimentary.'

'Would you call Byron sentimental?'

'Certainly not. He was the cause of sentimentality in others, but he hadn't a scrap of sentimentality himself. Whenever he pretended to be sentimental he had his tongue in his cheek; and it would, I think, be a perfectly safe bet that he never nursed a young gazelle in his life. As to Moore, he compared himself to Anacreon, but he wasn't in the least like Anacreon either; what he was was the perfect Master of Sentimentalism, quivering always upon the brink of tears. I do not know whether he set the note or only received and expressed it, but that is the note of all Victorian and immediately pre-Victorian sentimentality, both in verse and prose, from thenceforwards.'

'Thomas Moore wrote some good stuff, all the same,' I interrupted. 'I once edited an edition of all his poems, and so I ought to know.'

'The devil you did, Yorick! Wasn't it rather sticky work?'

'A trifle sugary, perhaps, but there are good lines in

*Lalla Rookh*, and elsewhere. He was nearer being a poet than Southey, anyway. What of the prose Victorians?'

'I haven't time. They would need a volume. The only point I want to make is that, though sentiment had been watered down (by too many tears, perhaps) to sentimentality, it still remained a most difficult thing to handle. To achieve sentimentality and yet avoid mawkishness was a ticklish job. Few, very few, achieved it, and the failure of the vast majority of the others is what, more than anything else, gave a later generation an easy excuse to scoff at its grandparents and to make "early Victorian" a term of reproach. Dickens is, perhaps, the most terrible example of the difficulty of walking that slippery *arête*. His Little Nells and Paul Dombey and Poor Joes and Tiny Tims are, beyond redemption, mawkish. He was always trying, but I think he only succeeded once, with one character.'

'I think I know which one,' I said. 'The Marchioness in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.'

'Just so. And particularly in that scene where, having nursed the lovable-unlovely Swiveller, he wakes up to find her playing cribbage against herself. He got the right note there, but he himself preferred the Little Nells. Extraordinary.'

'Thackeray, on the other hand, very often struck the right note . . .'

'I'm glad to hear you say that, Eugenius,' I said. 'I thought that even in your generation Thackeray was not read. We old people, of course, used to think him rather good at what you rightly call this ticklish job of sentimentality.'

'Perhaps I was old-fashioned,' said Eugenius. 'I read him all right, and still do; only now I only read *Esmond*. And it is in *Esmond* that he has achieved it most perfectly.'

'You mean,' I asked, 'in that scene of reconciliation with the widow after the duel and *Esmond*'s imprisonment and campaigns? When he comes back to Castlewood and in the little village church sees his mistress, from whom he has long been estranged, again; and she weeps on his shoulder in forgiveness, to the refrain of the psalm "Bringing

your sheaves with you". Yes, Thackeray handled that rather strange love-affair with great art, and he succeeds even in enlisting your sympathy, which, considering the age of the lady, is a very considerable achievement.'

'Look here, Yorick,' interrupted Eugenius. 'Where on earth have we got to? What about those lyrics? Where are those apples?'

He squinted up at the sun, that was now hot through the rose-white screen above us and was making dappled patterns for our feet.

'Sun well over the fore-yard, sir!' he announced, and sprang to his feet and saluted Navy fashion.

'Very well, Bosun,' I said. 'Pipe all hands. The cask is in the dairy. So are the tankards.'

'Ay, ay, sir.' And Eugenius went off cantingly, affecting to hitch loose breeches as he went.

This old farmhouse of mine has a dairy, sunk half underground and reached by steps from inside the old kitchen. It is wide and spacious; just frost-proof in winter and cool in summer.

Eugenius returned, bearing a large-lidded jug and two pewter tankards. 'A perfect beer cellar,' he said, and broke into song:

'And let me the canikin clink, clink;  
And let me the canikin clink.  
A soldier's a man; man's life but a span;  
Why, then, let a soldier drink.

Shakespeare's only drinking song,' he ended, and put down the jug. His lips were wet.

'I should have told you to keep whistling,' I said.

'Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn,' he retorted, pouring from high with a practised hand. 'And now, do let us get back to the lyrics and the real Shakespeare,' he added, as he sat down again and felt for his pipe.

'We have never left him—or them,' I said. 'These *parerga*—even your luminous discourse on sentiment—were all to the point. And I have dwelt on *Love's Labour's Lost* because it is a test play for real lovers of Shakespeare. The commentators don't care about it. It contains more

verse than any other play, but not (*pace* our Poet Laureate) more lyrics. Sonnets are not lyrics (nor, by the way, is Longaville's sonnet written in alexandrines). The King's verses are not lyrical, nor is any of the verse that is scattered up and down the play. You have to wait to the end for the only real lyric; but when it comes it is a beauty. There is . . .'

'I've been waiting for it this two hours,' interrupted Eugenius, 'and you can go on prosing while I say it to you.' And he began:

'When daisies pied, and violets blue,  
And lady-smocks all silver-white,  
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,  
Do paint the meadows with delight,  
The cuckoo then, on every tree, . . .

What cuckoo-buds were those, Yorick? My cuckoo-flowers were lady-smocks, those pale-lavender-laundered cress-cousins that grow in marshy places; and my cuckoo-pints were the hooded sheaths of the lords-and-ladies, with grey or brown slate pencils inside them.'

'So were mine, Eugenius. There are some of the first down by the pond, and you can see a wild arum hood under the hedge over there. I think his "cuckoo-buds of yellow hue" must have been marsh-marigolds.'

'English flowers are the same still, anyway, thank God,' said Eugenius, and went on:

'When Shepherds pipe on oaten straws,  
And merry larks are ploughmen's clocks,  
When turtles tread and rooks and daws,  
And maidens bleach their summer smocks,  
The cuckoo then, on every tree,  
Mocks married men . . .

There he goes, Yorick! Hear him!'

The call came from an old spruce in the piece of garden fronting the common—a favourite perch for cuckoos. He wasn't thirty yards away.

'And cuckoos are the same, too,' Eugenius went on; 'but I don't think shepherds pipe on oaten straws any more,



and I suppose ploughmen have wrist-watches. I should blow dandelions if I were a ploughman.'

'They don't seed in ploughing-time.'

'They would for me.'

'Did you ever make those pipes out of oaten straws or reeds, Yorick? You had to slit a little tongue just above a knot in the straw, and then you cut a couple of holes . . .'

'Yes, of course I did, Eugenius. Often. The penknife had to be very sharp and . . .'

'I wonder what sort of a penknife Shakespeare had, for of course he made them too, and woke Avon's banks with pipings, as we said in the chapter about his boyhood.'

'Of course he did. And when he had grown up, too, and began to court the Stratford maidens, like Oberon in the shape of Corin, sitting all day playing on pipes of corn and versing love to amorous Phillida.'

'No, you needn't read the winter stanza, Eugenius—this is May. And, besides, we must get on with the lyrics. Take the next play—at least, I think it was the next play he wrote—*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. There is only one lyric in that, and it is of the other kind, a love-lyric—but what a lovely one:

Love doth to her eyes repair  
To help him of his blindness . . .

A pretty conceit only, you say? Lyly might have written it? But listen to the next line:

And, being helped, inhabits there . . .

Lyly couldn't have done *that*, nor anybody else! Shakespeare himself never did better.'

'Usk and Wye and Eden,' murmured Eugenius. 'I bet you'll find a better presently—O Yorick, to one thing constant never.' And he began to hum 'Hey, nonny, nonny'. I took no notice.

'So,' I went on, 'we have here in the first two plays—young plays all are agreed (immature plays, according to the new critics)—these two lyrics, one of each kind, a nature lyric and a love lyric. And the point I want to

make, if you don't go on interrupting, is that he went on doing the same thing throughout his writing-life through all his plays, whenever he had a chance, and *never did anything better than these*. (I mean, he couldn't put them in his English historical plays or in *Julius Cæsar* or *Coriolanus* or *Timon*, but whenever he could, he did.) And—and this is the point—they are all of the same stamp and excellence, all of the same gold, all from the same mint. *They* cannot be strait-waistcoated into "stages of development" or psycho-analysed into being the products of varying moods which swayed his drifting and unstable soul.'

'“Warbling his native wood-notes wild”?' interjected Eugenius, reaching for his tankard.

'Milton could have done with a little more of that sort of wildness,' I replied. 'We should have had some more “Sabrina fair” if he had. And the love lyrics are not all native-wild. “Take, O take those lips away” is a good deal better, and closer to love too, than “Drink to me only with thine eyes”, and that was the sophisticated Jonson's best.'

'Oh no, it wasn't,' said Eugenius. '“Queen and huntress chaste and fair” is Ben's best lyric.'

'Perhaps it is. I don't care. What I am trying to get emphasised about the real Shakespeare is that he didn't change much or even develop in the sense that his mind grew in stature from age to age. His craftsmanship did; his dramatic sense did; his technique did; but not his mind, nor his poetic self, nor his sense of beauty, nor his love for love, nor his youth. He was young to the end of his days.

'He was always the same Shakespeare. His mind was always, after he was a grown man, of full stature. It only awaited opportunity—a touchstone. And the proof of that is in these lyrics. The first is as certain and as perfect as the last. I do not say that as he grew older and read more books and mixed with more men and heard their talk and gathered their experiences of life to himself (which he did as swiftly as the sun drinks dew), he did not reach wider and probe deeper into human nature. But the crucible of his brain held as sure a flux, the alembic of his mind as potent a

distillation at the beginning as it did at the end: it only depended what ore was brought to it to smelt. It was all there, latent, waiting:

As hoarded in the vine  
Hang the gold skins of undelirious wine;  
As Air sleeps till it toss its limbs in breeze, . . .

Do you remember those lines of Francis Thompson, Eugenius? They go on:

In whom the mystery that lives and sunders,  
Grapples and thrusts apart, endears, estranges,  
The dragon to its own Hesperides—  
Is gated under slow revolving changes,  
Manifold doors of heavy-hinged years.  
So once . . .

Listen, Eugenius . . .

So once, ere Heaven's eyes were filled with wonders  
To see Laughter rise from Tears,  
Lay in beauty not yet mighty,  
Couchéd in translucencies,  
The ante-natal Aphrodite,  
Caved magically under magic seas;  
Caved dreamlessly beneath the dreamful seas.

Yes. But when she rose, she rose complete and perfect. And as for all this talk about "stages of development"; "tempest of spirit"; "changes of mood"; "discouragement of spirit"; "weary magician"; and "cords snapping"—and the rest of it—it is the veriest nonsense and ecstasy of criticism, to quote Sir Walter Raleigh again; and, as I have said, an insult to that Shakespeare these critics are pretending to exalt.

'He had the serenity of genius above all other men. The old tag that great wit to madness is near allied may be true of certain forms of unbalanced and paranoic genius; it is not true of real genius. True genius is serene and master of its art.

'Shakespeare always kept complete control of himself—and of his muse. He gave to many airy nothings a local habitation and a name, but (whatever Marlowe may have

done) I do not see Shakespeare rolling his eyes in a fine, or any sort of, frenzy.'

Eugenius said nothing.

'Do you agree with me about the lyrics?' I insisted. 'Do you agree that they are all, first to last, of the same mint, stamped with the same image and superscription? *Cymbeline* is by all admitted a late play and *The Tempest*, by general consensus, to be the last of all. Yet "Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings" is of the same singing note as "When daisies pied," which we have just been reading; and "Where the bee sucks" comes clearly from the same oaten-straw.

"Who is Silvia", his first love lyric, is of the same quality (though in a different key) as "Take, O take those lips away", which is probably his last, for I do not remember that any play written later than *Measure for Measure* contains one.'

'I think you make your point,' said Eugenius judicially; 'but how if they say he kept a stock of lyrics by him, written at odd times, and popped them into any play he happened to be writing, if they seemed to fit—or even if they didn't?'

'It would make no difference to the argument. If you agree that they are all of the same quality, it is as conclusive backwards as forwards.'

'That is logical enough,' said Eugenius; 'but they might get out of it by saying that they were *all* written young, before he began play-writing, and used afterwards as occasion served.'

'Oh, well . . .' I began.

'It's just the sort of thing they *would* say. I don't think the Shakespearean commentators, as a class, like the lyrics much. They are not exactly lyrical themselves, and regard them, I fancy, as callow stuff and would be glad of an excuse to say so!'

'There is another point I want to make,' I said, 'if you will let me . . .'

'Let you? I! Who's been talking?' said Eugenius indignantly, and emptied his tankard. 'By the way,' he went on before I could begin again, 'did Shakespeare drink beer?'

'There you are!' I said. 'Yes, I think he did. Not generally perhaps, but sometimes. Yes, I'm sure he did. Christopher Sly's "For God's sake, a pot of small ale!" is too heartfelt a cry not to have been born of experience.' And I emptied my own.

'Yes,' said Eugenius; 'and if you remember, after a decent interval: "And once again, a pot o' the smallest ale"'. Well, what about that other point? I am all attention.'

'Oh, I've forgotten what it was now.'

'Never mind,' said Eugenius, and filled his tankard again. 'Let us go on talking about beer and Shakespeare in his cups. D'you know, Yorick, I've passed through Stratford a few times, but I've never been to see any of the show places. I'd much sooner make a pilgrimage of all the inns round about to find Christopher Sly and the rest of Shakespeare's country boon companions.'

'I've done it,' I said. 'I've looked for Christopher at the Wilmcote Inn more than once, but he wasn't there. But I once met Falstaff in Stratford.'

'Did you, by George? Where and how, and who was he? I mean in what guise?'

'He was a brewer's drayman, and it was just outside the Falcon Hotel. I had just come out of the door to look at the weather—I was canoeing—and a great big dray drove up. It was a proper brewer's dray drawn by a pair of great sleek horses, with fluff all down their legs and polished brass horse-jewellery—you know the things—shining and winking on their chests. The driver, perched high before his barrels, was a huge, ventripotent, red-faced man of some fifty summers, or by'r lady inclining to three-score, and he was the dead image of Falstaff, whiskers and beard and all.

'He had an enormous sun-hat on his head of loose-woven straw and he was dressed in a loose, light, dusty-millerish sort of suit, for it was a hot day in August and he did not mean to sweat extraordinary if he could help it. He sat there, flicking his whip in the sun, while his hirelings—Bardolph and the Boy grown up, Nym wasn't there—began to roll the barrels down a board from the tilt. When I

hailed him as "Sir John" he turned an humorous eye upon me, but acknowledged the greeting. We talked for a little about the weather, and then he climbed down and we went together into the Boar's Head.'

'The Boar's Head?'

'Yes, the Falcon had become the Boar's Head all of a sudden. We found quite a lot of the old crowd inside, too. Poins was there, but not Prince Hal—you'd hardly expect that, after Agincourt—and Francis and Pistol . . .'

'And Doll Tearsheet?'

'Yes, she was there. A bit subdued though, not quite in her old form.'

'What did you talk about?'

'Oh, everything. Old times—and the battle of Shrewsbury—and the red-nose innkeeper of Daventry—and the Lord Chief Justice—and Justice Shallow (he laughed like anything when I asked him if he'd ever paid back that thousand pounds)—and Will Squele—and old Double—and . . . well, I really don't remember anything very clearly. The beer was good—Flower's—and the sun was hot, and next thing I knew I found myself in my canoe floating down Avon and half way to Evesham. I must have pulled over at half a dozen mills, too, before I woke up. Queer thing.'

'Very,' said Eugenius. 'And now, have you any more "points" to make? Because I'm feeling it must be near lunch-time.'

'No. I'm not going to talk any more, and I expect you've had enough.'

'Oh, I don't know. We might talk some more about Shakespeare's women. Which of 'em do you love best?'

'Imogen, I think. She was Keats' choice, too, I fancy.'

'Why pick out a married woman?'

'I hadn't seemed to notice it, somehow. Besides, they're all married women sooner or later. Couldn't well help it, could they?'

'No; not unless there were no men. I'm for Rosalind—oh—and Beatrice and Viola and Perdita and . . .'

'And the whole lot! So are we all, I fancy.'

We got up to go in to lunch.

'You haven't got much nearer the really real Shakespeare, after all, have you, Yorick?' said Eugenius. 'I'll take the tappit-hen and the tankards, and you bring the chairs.'

'Don't you think we have? Not directly, perhaps, but don't you think he has emerged a little, as it were, through our talk and the lyrics and—and so on?'

'Perhaps. Who cares? If they can't or won't see him, they can't or won't. What sort of a man do you really think he was, Yorick?'

'Just like you and me, Eugenius, only a lot more, a very great deal more, in every way. That's what geniuses are. But we've said that several times already and implied it oftener still. The great thing to insist on is his humanity. He was not a demi-god or a Titan, but a man; and a man who, above all things, loved human companionship and the society of friends. This passion persisted to the end of his life; and it is fairly well authenticated that he died of a chill caught in the treacherous April weather while coming home to New Place in the early hours of the morning after a protracted symposium with some of his Warwickshire friends. And always kind, gentle, equable—and as sane as Socrates. And always young at heart. Shakespeare was born young—and never grew old.'

'It's a very important thing to be born young,' said Eugenius, as we walked up the grass path back to the house.

'The most important thing there is,' I said; 'for you cannot alter it afterwards. There are only two sorts of men—those who are born young and those who are born old. I thank heaven I was born young.'

'Yes,' said Eugenius; 'and those who are born old are never young, and those who are born young never get old. You will still be a child, Yorick, when you are a hundred.'

'I hope to God I shall,' I said fervently.

After lunch we went for a long walk through the Wormsley woods to Porto Bello and Christmas Common. In the dusk of the beech-woods the wild hyacinths were "washed wet like lakes", and you could see why Gerard Hopkins

called them "greybells azuring over". There were plenty of cowslips, short-stalked in the meadows, tall sentinels in the hedge-banks under the woods, and we brushed our faces with them and counted their spots. We came back by the old sunk road, now a lost lane, which comes down to Stonor, and which must have been a road in King Alfred's time, for it is lined with yews—a sure sign of ancientry. Someone had been felling the trees on the slopes above Turville in a wholesale, vandalish, and wasteful manner. 'Bad forestry,' Eugenius had growled; and the rumour at the inn was that a local builder had bought the wood and sold it to a company to convert into matches. As I don't think you can make matches out of beech, I suppose it would have been to make the boxes.

Except for this sadness it was a splendid walk, and the darling buds of May were dear. I remembered all of a sudden, as we got back near sunset, that I had left my old copy of *Shakespeare* lying on its back under the apple-tree. 'I must not leave it out all night,' I thought, 'for there will be a heavy dew'; and I went down the garden to bring it in.

It wasn't where I had left it, but, looking about, I found it laid in a crook of one of the gnarled branches of the apple-tree, high and dry above the grass.

'My familiar leprechaun has been here,' I thought. 'My "drudging goblin"'. I mustn't forget to set the cream-bowl for him to-night.'



## Chapter XII

### SHAKESPEARE HIMSELF

*It is required  
You do awake your faith. Then all stand still;  
Or those that think it is unlawful business  
I am about, let them depart.*

THE WINTER'S TALE

That same evening of mid-May, after dinner, Eugenius and I had set the gate-legged oak table a little away from the wood fire, and were sitting over against the fire ourselves, watching the flames leap and listening to their purring, for the evenings were still cold.

On the table lay a pile of typed manuscript—ten chapters of the Book. We were drugged with air and sunshine and the scent of cowslips and of woods in young leaf. We had not yet begun to smoke, for the burgundy was not yet finished. Eugenius looked with a dreamy but satisfied eye at the pile of manuscript.

'Some work,' he murmured. 'You are a monument of industry, Yorick; it's a pleasure to collaborate with you. Did you type it all, as well?'

'You know quite well, Eugenius, that I could no more dominate a typing-machine than I could pilot a Hurricane fighter-plane. Writing down all your stuff was quite enough.'

Eugenius was already half asleep again. Presently he said dreamily, 'Was that really a nightingale we heard in the Wormsley woods to-day? I thought they didn't sing by day.'

'Well, they do. It was.'

Eugenius seemed to go to sleep again.

'D'you know, Yorick, I think Keats made a mistake in

that ode,' he murmured after a time. I too had been saying the ode to myself, and I followed his thoughts.

'What mistake?' I asked.

'It was mid-May, as it is to-day, and he talks of musk-roses. Now the fringes of the woods we walked through to-day were full of wood-rose—musk-rose—tangles, but I saw none even in the smallest bud.'

'Nor I; but it is a very late spring. I suppose you *might* see a musk-rose bud by mid-May in an exceptionally early year, though I doubt it. Not up here in the Chilterns, anyway. But you could pick other holes in that stanza. The "pastoral eglantine" is merely the dog-rose, and that wouldn't be in bud either, though as a matter of fact it is earlier than the musk-rose. And "pastoral" is one of the few instances of a poor choice of an adjective of which Keats can be convicted. He is nearly always so safe, so unerring. Like "alien" corn. And I have always thought "mid-May's eldest child" a palpable mistake. If the musk-rose buds were there they would surely have been mid-May's *youngest* children, just barely born, not her eldest child.'

'Oh, well, poets are allowed to be a little casual about these things,' said Eugenius tolerantly. 'It doesn't much matter.'

'I think it does, rather. It annoys and distracts me when they do it. They oughtn't to. I don't think you will ever find *me* putting flowers in their wrong months, Eugenius—committing floral anachronisms, so to speak.'

'I dare say not,' said Eugenius simply. 'I was talking about poets.'

'Thank you, Eugenius,' I said, laughing. 'You remind me of a story they tell about the late Duke of Bedford. He had a place down by Tamar banks by the Morwell Rocks, Endsleigh Cottage—a duke's cottage, of course, with wonderful gardens—and he went down there once a year for a week's salmon fishing. He was, however (at the time of this story), a keen rather than an expert salmon-fisher. One day, when he had been thrashing the Tamar for hours and never a rise, he said a little irritably to his water-bailiff, who was rowing him, "It's a strange thing the salmon never seem rising when I come down to fish. Why

can't you manage better for me? My guests get fish all right. Why, only last week, you tell me, Lord Thingamy and Sir John Whatsisname got half-a-dozen fish apiece in two days."

"Y . . . yes, your grace," said the bailiff, an honest man who stammered a little. "Y . . . yes, b . . . but you s . . . see, your Grace, *they* were f . . . f . . . fishermen."

'How did the Duke take it?' asked Eugenius.

'Very well; just as I did,' I said. 'In fact, I believe he told the story of himself—as he must have done originally, if you come to think of it—just as I propose to do.'

'Oh, well,' said Eugenius, 'I didn't mean anything unkind. You write fairly decent verse sometimes, Yorick; but you're not a poet, you know.'

'Don't I know it!' I said, as I filled Eugenius' glass and buzzed the bottle into my own.

Eugenius woke up and rose to his feet, glass in hand.

'Here's to the Book, and to Norway,' he said. 'I was once in Norway, fishing. It is a clean country, wild, simple, virginal, unspoiled. What was that toast we used to drink there? "*Min skål, din skål*"—I can't say it in Norwegian, but it ran, "My health and thy health and the health of all pretty girls". Hurrah for Norway!' And he drank and sat down again and took a cigar from the box.

'Look here, Yorick,' he went on, when he had got it going. 'This won't do. You said there were to be twelve chapters, so we've one more to do. What's it to be about? We've pretty well covered the ground, I think, already.'

'Shakespeare is inexhaustible,' I said. 'But, I agree, we have written about as much as our readers will stand. This chapter must be a chapter of loose ends. Let us look around and see what loose ends we've left.'

'Well,' said Eugenius, considering, 'we've said nothing about Shakespeare's morals—or his religious opinions. I've been expecting you to try to make out that Shakespeare was a Catholic.'

'His morals are his own affair and nobody else's,' I said, 'and so is his religion; though books have been written to prove that he was a Catholic, and also that he wasn't. I believe that someone has even wildly tried to maintain that

he was a Puritan! That suggestion, of course, is beyond lunacy; but, on the other hand, I do not think that Shakespeare was a Catholic, not a practising one, at any rate. What is clear, however, is that he possessed the *anima naturaliter catholica*. A thousand lines in his plays witness it and it breathes in all he wrote. His father, John Shakespeare, was certainly a Catholic, and continued in the old religion till his fortunes failed and he could no longer afford to pay the fines for recusancy. Mary Arden would have naturally been brought up a Catholic, for she would have been born before England ceased to be Catholic, and she may have clung to the old religion in secret. Women are both pious and conservative. As to the young William, my own idea is that he too would, in infancy, have imbibed Catholicism at his mother's knee, and that while his father remained a Catholic, he too would have remained one. His master at Stratford Grammar School, Simon Hunt, was a fervent Catholic who, as the persecution of the old order grew harsher and more stringent, left Stratford to go to Rome and become a Jesuit priest, and he would certainly have tried to give the boys in his charge Catholic teaching; and in the impressionable years from seven to ten the mind of Shakespeare would have received a stamp of Catholic belief and morals which would be enduring. But after his father was forced to fall away and after the young Shakespeare left Stratford, and reached London, and, indeed, to the end of his life, I would not pretend to say that he retained the practice of his faith, though I think the faith was always in him. It was not easy in the time of Elizabeth or of James for anyone to be a practising Catholic.

'During all his years in London I should doubt if he ever practised any religion. It was easier in London to avoid attendance at any place of worship, and the recusancy laws were less easy to enforce there than in Stratford or anywhere in the country, where absence from church on Sundays would have been marked and gossiped upon by all, and the foul business of the informer would have been made simple for him.'

'What exactly do you mean, Yorick, when you say that

Shakespeare had the *anima naturaliter catholica*?' asked Eugenius.

'In a sense,' I replied, 'I suppose that all poets have that kind of mind. It is their happy heritage, to whatever creed they may belong, because they are the high-priests of beauty, and since all earthly beauty is but the garment of God, they cannot help serving at His altar.'

'No poet was ever yet an atheist—though the young Shelley tried to pretend he was—nor ever will be. But in the case of Shakespeare I mean more than that. I mean that all his writings show that he was Catholic-minded; that his sympathies were with the old order; that he held by the old reverences and the old sanctities and the old virtues; that he disliked innovations; and that he loathed cant and hypocrisy. Next to a disloyal friend I think he hated a hypocrite. He had a good precedent.'

'There is very little direct mention of religion anywhere in all the plays,' said Eugenius. 'I fancy it was a subject to be avoided.'

'Very much so. In Elizabeth's—or James's—England both politics and religion, and the two were so interweaved as to be almost one, were dangerous subjects, and no man who had his living to get and a wife and children to support, or, indeed, who was careful of his own neck, would be wise to write about them.'

'Walsingham and Cecil had a Gestapo of their own, and informers lurked in every corner. Even to speak openly of such matters, unless you were very sure of your friend, was, during the whole period of Shakespeare's life, a hazardous business.'

'I imagine that even in the usually free and fearless air of the Mermaid Tavern whenever any such matter came up there was an uneasy interchange of glances, and that someone pretended that there was lime in his sack and cursed the drawer, or otherwise swiftly changed the subject.'

'So that when you do find in Shakespeare any hint or suggestion of any religious doctrine or Catholic conviction, it will follow either that it escaped him unconsciously or

that he made it purposely casual and unemphatic. Looked at in this way, it is easy enough to see from such casual asides and scattered allusions on which side his sympathies lay.

'As to Puritanism and Puritans he is merely contemptuous as a rule, and lets his opinion of them appear through such casual utterances as Falstaff's "I would I were a weaver—I could sing psalms or anything", or Aguecheek's "I hate a politician,—I had rather be a Brownite than a politician."'

'What was a Brownite?' asked Eugenius.

'Followers of one Robert Browne, who flourished about that time: anti-episcopals, independants, the forerunners of the Congregationalists; one of the countless sects that inevitably arise when authority is denied, for dissent is sporadic and propagates by scission.

'Against Shakespeare's dislike of Puritans you may set his obvious partiality for friars. He is constantly introducing them, and wherever he does so he shows a liking and respect which is in striking contrast with the way in which they are handled by most of his contemporary playwrights. On the other hand, you will observe that whenever he does make fun of clerics, they are invariably Protestants, like Sir Nathaniel in *Love's Labour's Lost*, or Sir Oliver Martext in *As You Like It*, or the Welsh parson, Sir Hugh Evans, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

'I agree, however, with Mr. Christopher Hollis (in his book on Queen Elizabeth) that: "To show that Shakespeare had a partiality for friars is not to show that he was a Catholic. . . . What is important is to show that he thought they were priests and that they had certain God-given powers which neither Elizabethan clergymen nor any other men possess."

'You must show, that is to say, not merely that Shakespeare extended the mantle of his charity and human kindness to priests as well as to drunkards and murderers, but that he knew them for what they were and that he revered and respected them as priests and not merely as men. Yet even this would not be enough, by itself, to prove that

Shakespeare was (as I believe he was) a Catholic at heart and that, had he lived in happier times, he would have been a practising Catholic.

'It is possible (for I have seen it, so strange is the mind of man) to believe that a priest is ordained of God and yet not be convinced of the necessity and efficacy of the Sacraments he is ordained to administer. If, however, you can prove from the plays that Shakespeare believed in the necessity and efficacy of Catholic Sacraments, then I think you could say with certainty that he was a Catholic at heart.'

'And can you?' asked Eugenius. 'I can only think of one instance at the moment. The complaint of Hamlet's father's ghost that he was sent to his account "Unhousel'd, unanointed, unanealed". But that is only the Ghost speaking, who apparently had been in life a Catholic.'

'Why need Shakespeare have made him one? Denmark was never a conspicuously Catholic country. Why make him complain that he was deprived by sudden death of *two* Sacraments of the Catholic Church, both of which the Reformers rejected—the Sacraments of Penance and of Extreme Unction? That, however, is but one instance. I could give you a hundred others in which Shakespeare seems to go out of his way to bring in his conviction of the necessity and efficacy of Catholic Sacraments, and most often, and most convincingly, of the Sacrament of Penance. I could even prove to you, I think, from certain passages, that Shakespeare had almost a theological knowledge of the inmost meanings of that Sacrament.'

'Please don't trouble,' said Eugenius. 'It would take too long—and I mightn't understand it even then.'

'Well, I won't—but I'll mention one or two for you to ponder over. There's a line in Sonnet xxxv:

Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are . . .

which sounds to me like a reminiscence of the words "*ad excusandas excusationes in peccatis*", descriptive of God's forgiveness of sins and His more than readiness to forgive them. The whole of that Sonnet is redolent of Catholic moral theology.

'Next you might consider this passage from Act v of *Cymbeline*:

POSTHUMUS

Is't enough I'm *sorry*?  
 So children temporal fathers do appease;  
 Gods are more full of mercy. Must I *repent*?  
 I cannot do it better than in gyves,  
 Desired more than constrained. To *satisfy*?  
 If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take  
 No stricter render of me than my all.

"Stricter" here means "narrower", "less". And you have in these lines the theological Catholic distinction between *Contrition*, *Resolution to amend* and *Atonement*.

'I need not refer you to the numberless references to the Sacrament of Penance all through the plays. They are plain enough, and they seem to me to show clearly that Shakespeare believed in the necessity for confession and the efficacy of the Sacrament and the power of priests to absolve.'

'I don't know very much about Catholic doctrine, or doctrine of any kind,' said Eugenius, 'but *Measure for Measure* has always struck me as a very Catholic-minded play.'

'You are quite right. I cannot conceive that that play could have been written by anyone who had not been brought up as a Catholic and to whom his Catholic beliefs still clung. In all Shakespeare's plays I could show, I think, that his conception of the Christian virtues was Catholic rather than Protestant, but in this play most of all.'

'Surely the Christian virtues are the same to all Christians,' objected Eugenius.

'By no means. The Protestant Reformers did not change their names, but they vitally altered the understanding in men's minds of what they truly stand for. If you examine, for instance, the meaning which Spenser attaches to the virtues which form the theme of each of the books of his *Faerie Queene*, you will see at once that, though they are still called Justice, Truth, Chastity, and so forth, they are Protestant conceptions of those virtues. You may know at once from his treatment of them that Spenser was a Protestant, a Tudor Protestant at that. In Shakespeare's mouth they



are not so; they are Catholic still. I cannot go through them all, but take the two virtues which, I think, more than the rest seem to have suffered a sea-change at the Reformation—the virtues of humility and of chastity. As to humility, the Protestant conception of that virtue seldom seems to go beyond a sort of physical humility, an acceptance of his lowly station by the lowly (a very proper thing, too, and most useful to authority and the State!); but humility of *mind*, which is the real Catholic humility, the Protestant hardly ever seems to consider as a virtue. This Protestant attitude of mind was no doubt partly the cause, as it has certainly been the increasing effect, of insistence upon the right of private judgement in matters of faith (not of conduct). It would be possible to show that Shakespeare admired and understood the true humility.

‘But it is that other virtue of chastity which the Reformers completely killed the very conception of in the Protestant mind. It killed it, in fact, at once, though Protestants have continued to pretend—or possibly to believe—that the waxen image which continued to bear its name was the virtue itself. You have only, however, to glance through English literature from Tudor times to the present to see that it was killed then, and that what has since masqueraded in its place has been not chastity but respectability; not a virtue but a convention; not a Divine Ordinance but a human social asset. The terms of the Protestant Marriage Service support this view, and Richardson’s *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* confirms it utterly.

‘Thus, from the Reformation onwards what I may call the *Pamela-concept* of female chastity became and continued, until quite recently, to be the accepted substitute for the old Catholic virtue of chastity as a virtue *per se*. Now even the *Pamela-concept* of chastity seems to have melted, as, indeed, it was inevitable that it should. Conventional virtue has no roots.

‘But in *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare shows clearly that he held to the Catholic idea of chastity. It seemed right to him and natural that a sister should prize her chastity above her brother’s life. Shakespeare saw Isabella, the

virgin vowed to chastity, as he makes even the libertine Lucio to see her, as "a thing enskied and sainted".

'Modern critics cannot understand it. Even the waxen image of conventional or socially-convenient chastity is gone, and to them it seems a foolish play and its *motif* almost absurd. A few years ago I read, in a much-read literary weekly paper, a criticism on the play by a dramatic critic who, after condemning it as one of Shakespeare's worst plays, said that the very theme of the story was so exaggeratedly improbable as to destroy interest, for that no one could sympathise with Isabella for refusing to save her brother's life when *by merely spending half an hour with a man* she could have done so.'

'H'm; not very nice, even to my somewhat pagan mind,' said Eugenius. 'Let us hope the writer had no sisters. Well, Yorick, I think you can leave it at that. Shakespeare was not a practising Catholic, but he sympathised with the old religion and he disliked Puritans. Will that satisfy you?'

'Yes,' I said. 'There is, of course, the testimony, for what it is worth, of the Reverend Richard Davies, a Gloucester parson, who says of Shakespeare, "He died a Papist". That was, however, some fifty or sixty years after Shakespeare's death. It shows no more than that some such rumour existed in the countryside, but is deserving of some belief because (a) a Protestant parson would not have recorded it unless he thought it well-founded, and (b) in the year 1616, when Shakespeare died, four priests were hanged, drawn, and quartered for being priests, and the ministrations of the priest who attended Shakespeare's death-bed would have had to be somewhat secret.'

'That's enough religion,' said Eugenius. 'Behold our Shakespeare: the gentle Shakespeare; kind, tolerant, serene; a master of his art and not its slave, and so comprehensively and intensely human that there was no manifestation of human nature which he did not understand or with which he was not in sympathy, and no complication of the human spirit or tangled web of human emotion the gordian knot of which he could not unloose, familiar as his garter.'

'He hated Puritans because it is the note of all Puritans that they think themselves better than their neighbours. Shakespeare never did that. He knew himself for as human and as weak as they and, knowing that, he was always ready to condone and quick to forgive. That sonnet you quoted just now shows how ready and how quick.'

'“There, but for the grace of God, goes William Shakespeare” was always in his heart,’ I agreed, ‘and very near his lips. And being intensely human, he knew human temptation as you and I, Eugenius, probably have never done. He had the world, the flesh, and the devil to contend with, as all men have. As for the world, I think his humour saved him: he never took the world too seriously; and the devil he kept at arm’s length. He did not take even his own poetry and his own genius anything like so seriously (I think) as these heavy commentators try to make out. He knew that what he had written was good; he knew it would live; and he took pleasure in the writing, the pleasure of accomplishment and self-expression, but he never let it be an obsession or a hounding, or anything but a labour of love and a means of livelihood and a source of the wherewithal to enable him to enjoy human companionship and make provision for his latter years.

‘Wealth for its own sake did not tempt him, nor glory, nor the adulation of the mob. Affection was what he craved, and the liking of his friends and companions. Courtiers he knew and great men of the state and the nobility, but he preferred the society of his peers—and of wits and fools and clowns and boon companions. He would always have preferred the country to the town—and, as soon as he could, he left London to plant mulberry-trees.’

‘You’ve left out the sins of the flesh,’ said Eugenius, cocking an eye at the empty bottle of burgundy.

‘Have I? I thought I had implied that from *them* he was *not* immune, but that, though he was what I suppose Barebones would call a “wine-bibber” and was no saint with women, it is his very excess of humanity that made his temptations the greater in those ways and that excuses him.

I am afraid that there is no doubt—but why should I be afraid?—there *is* no doubt that he was fond of wine all his life and that all his life he was in love with love. His intense humanity and his pleasure in human companionship excuse the one and his intense sense and appreciation of beauty the other. He never drank for the sake of drinking; he always loved for the sake of loving.'

'And so all lovers and drinkers should adore him,' said Eugenius, 'and no Puritan, no ascetic, no teetotaller, no self-righteous, pharisaical, better-than-my-neighbour kind of unpleasant person should ever be allowed even to read him. A very good conclusion to our summing-up!

'But, I say, look here, Yorick,' he added. 'We haven't yet said anything about Shakespeare's personal appearance. What do *you* think he looked like? Are any of the supposed portraits any good? Which d'you think is probably the best?'

'There are,' I said, 'twenty individual portraits, busts, or other simulacra of William Shakespeare, none of which, I think, are very much like the original and actual man. None of them are life-portraits. All are works of reminiscence, secondhand description, or pure imagination. The most likely, therefore, to be nearest the truth are those which were executed the soonest after Shakespeare's death. By that criterion the two most likely to present a modicum of likeness are the half-length statue in the parish church of Stratford-on-Avon, which was put up there within six years of his death, and the engraving by Martin Droeshout used as a frontispiece to the First Folio, which was published seven years after his death. The statue is probably an attempt to represent him as he was at the time of his death, a respected citizen of Stratford aged fifty-two.

'The Droeshout print is probably an attempt to represent him as his friends and fellows of his company remembered him when he was with them producing his plays, and is, therefore, the more interesting of the two.

'Neither attempt would seem to have been very successful, but there is this to be said of the Droeshout print—that it satisfied his friends Heminge and Condell, the editors of

the First Folio, and, presumably, his other surviving friends, for Ben Jonson praises it in his memorial verses.

'Moreover, it seems probable that there must have been some portrait from which Droeshout executed the engraving. The only portrait extant which is at all like the Droeshout print is the "Flower Portrait", now in the Shakespeare Museum at Stratford, and so called because presented by Mrs. Charles Flower.

'Much ink has been spilled in affirming and in denying that the print was, or could have been, derived from the portrait, but there is no doubt that they are somewhat alike. If it was, then, of course, the portrait is the oldest and most authentic likeness we have got, but it is quite possible, on the other hand, that someone copied the portrait from the print.'

'He didn't improve it much if he did,' said Eugenius; 'but, all the same, I rather like the Flower Portrait. Neither print nor picture is good of its kind, and neither Martin nor the painter (whoever he was) was a master of his art. But I think, somehow, they are both just a little like what Shakespeare was. Both have a humorous eye and lip, and so, I think (allowing for the poorness of execution), may Shakespeare have looked while listening gladly to fools and biding his time before he annihilated would-be wits. Both, at any rate, are quite human.'

'The picture almost *too* much so, don't you think?' I said. 'The eyes are sleepier than in the print, and the lower lip almost too sensuous and suggestive of bacchic indulgence and the chimes at midnight.'

'It's a bad picture, I agree,' said Eugenius; 'but I'm convinced that Shakespeare had a somewhat drooping and sensuous lower lip. You remember that we were agreeing the other day that that great scene in *Henry IV* where Falstaff and Prince Hal alternately act the King and the Prince was a reminiscence of a similar "play-extempore" acted at the Mermaid? And you remember that you were insisting, and rightly, that Shakespeare liked to see himself in Prince Hal—did, in fact, reproduce his own youth in him? Very well, then. See what Falstaff says of Prince Hal's personal

appearance,' and Eugenius picked up the copy of *Shakespeare* from the table and found the place:

'That thou art my son I have partly thy mother's word, partly my own opinion; but chiefly a villainous trick of thine eye and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip that doth warrant me.

Now, I'm sure that is a chaffing picture of the young Shakespeare, and if you look at the Droeshout print—or even the portrait after allowing for very bad workmanship—you can see that behind their demure glance those eyes hold a villainous twinkle that bodes ill to foolish adversaries, and that those lips were . . .'

'Before this description gets any more intimately personal,' said a pleasant voice behind us, 'I think I had better make myself known and visible.'

We both of us leaped to our feet and turned to see him standing there on the other side of the oak table. There was no doubt at all as to who he was.

He was dressed in Elizabethan doublet and hose, very point-device, and with lace about the neck and shoulders, but not a stiff ruff nor so Puritan-looking a collar as in the Droeshout print. Much more of the courtier and the gallant.

Nor was his face much like either the print or the picture, though there was a faint resemblance. His forehead was splendid, and his eyes held an alerter look and were now dancing with amusement, and though the nether lip was parted from the upper on the very edge of laughter, it did not really droop and was not gross as in the picture. He stood there smiling at us, a handsome man in the prime of young manhood, his age about thirty-three or thirty-four.

So we stood for a long moment staring at him, and then he came towards us round the table with either hand held out before him. I, being on his left as he came, grasped his left hand; Eugenius grasped his right.

The hand I grasped was warm and friendly; and I held it a little time before, drawing him towards my armchair, I begged him to take it.

'No, no,' he said. 'Sit you both down again; I shall be very well here.' And he leaped backwards and up upon the

oak table and sat there between our chairs, facing the fire and dangling his gartered legs.

'I shall do very well here,' he said. 'Often have I sat thus, I mean I've often sat this way, at the Mermaid. With my feet off the ground and swinging, I seemed to have my head more alert.'

'Not like Antæus then?' I ventured.

'He was of the earth, earthy,' said Shakespeare. 'You would not have me like him?'

'No, no,' I said. 'Though on earth a man must be of the earth somewhat. But now, tell me . . .' I felt a little diffident, but went on, 'tell me, how much of the earth are you now? Are you really . . .'

'I am as real as I ever was,' he said, smiling. 'This is me; this is my mortal body resurrected and glorified, though I cannot show it to you as it shows itself glorified in heaven, for you could not bear to see it—and so I show it to you as it was when I wore it on earth.' He turned to Eugenius, who had been regarding him with wide eyes and parted lips much as an old-fashioned child who still believed might gaze at his first Father Christmas. 'Why be so amazed? How otherwise could I show myself? Have I not a precedent that should satisfy you that so, and not otherwise, must the glorified body, if it return to earth at all, return? It is not so long since you were, I suppose, keeping the feast of the Resurrection and, only the other day, of the Ascension of our Saviour. Is not England Christian still?'

Eugenius seemed about to speak, but closed his lips again and said nothing, still staring like a child. I was relieved, for I had been fearing that he would break out into some irrepressible and irresponsible question or remark—for, as you may have observed, he is no respecter of persons—that would frighten our visitor away or offend him. I had never seen Eugenius tongue-tied before. I hastened to reply to Shakespeare's question.

'England is still Christian in name,' I said, '(though Eugenius himself is, as he told me just now, half a pagan), and she still keeps the Feasts of the Church.'

'They were altering things in my time,' said Shakespeare,

'and not, I thought, for the better. They had jettisoned some of the cargo they did not like, but I had not supposed they would scuttle the ship. Do they still retain the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene, even if not, perhaps, the Athanasian?'

'That is rather strong meat,' I said. 'Even I . . .'

'Oh, it is all quite true,' said Shakespeare, 'or so far as human language is capable of expressing things beyond man's understanding, though it is not, I dare say, for everyday use. But if they still say the Nicene or even only the Apostles' Creed, they must still believe in the Resurrection of Our Lord and in the resurrection of the body. Why wonder, then? For is it not plain that if I make myself known to you it must be as one of you, in a guise you know and which your mortal senses can test and recognise?'

Eugenius found his tongue at last. 'Yes, yes,' he said eagerly. 'Even I can see that. You mean that since we, Yorick and I, are still human, still three-dimensional creatures, you, though now raised to the *n*th dimension, must descend again to our state, or we could not see or know you present. I remember, years ago, reading a book called *Flatland* in which a three-dimensional creature tried to appear to and evangelise the land of two dimensions, but of course the inhabitants could only see him as a superficies, and when he tried to convince them of thickness as well as of length and breadth they stoned him for an impostor—or what they could see of him. It was all very obvious.'

'If you like to put it that way, it will do,' said Shakespeare, 'and even if you be half a pagan (which I doubt), you will see that, if I come at all, I must come as came Our Blessed Lord himself after His Resurrection, when He came among His disciples in the guise in which they knew Him, and talked with them and ate and drank with them . . .'

'Then, then . . .' interrupted Eugenius, half getting up, 'then . . . Mr. . . . er . . . oh, I say, I can't call you Mr. Shakespeare—it sounds too silly. May I just call you Shakespeare? You can . . .'

'Thou may'st call me Will an thou wilt—I mean, you may call me Will if you like,' said Shakespeare, smiling. 'They



all of them did, or most of them: those I liked, at least, and they were nearly all.'

'Th-thank you very much,' said Eugenius, almost stammering with excitement. 'What I was going to say was, Yorick won't mind my offering you his wine—but c-can you, w-will you join us?' And without waiting for an answer he went to fetch a fresh bottle and another glass.

'With all my heart,' said Shakespeare, and as he watched Eugenius uncork the bottle and fill our glasses, his face was a study in kindness and understanding.

'It is burgundy,' I said, as we all three lifted our glasses. 'I do not remember that you speak of it in any of your plays.'

'I know it,' said Shakespeare, and he drank with us and set his glass down. 'We saw little of it in England when I was living; the Flemings and the French kept it for themselves, and little wine, if any, came to us from France. But I have drunk it at my Lord of Southampton's and other great houses. Henry would have it shipped across when he could; and I have shared a flagon with Daniel, for he was a great traveller and versed in wines and liked them of the best, and had friends in France who would send him sometimes a cask from that favoured land of Burgundy.'

'But this is better wine,' he added as he drank again, 'than I ever tasted then. It is fuller and less harsh. They have better learned the art of making and keeping it.'

'I am glad it pleases you,' I said. 'But tell me, Shakespeare,' and I set my glass down, 'how is it that you speak as I, as we do, and not as they did, not as you and Ben Jonson and Marlowe and the rest of them, spoke? I had thought to hear you . . .'

'Is it not natural,' he interrupted a little impatiently, 'that I should speak in the language you best understand, the language of the moment, since all languages are now alike to me? Were I to make myself known in France, should I not speak in French, or in Spain, Spanish, and modern French or Spanish at that? Would it not be the veriest commonplace of courtesy? Though I confess that the older locutions have once or twice come to my lips unbidden. If I were living now, should I not speak as you do, or as any

cultivated Englishman who is fond of poetry does, let us say? Do you take me for a boor?’

‘I beg your pardon,’ I said, unhurt, for his eyes were laughing as he spoke, ‘I might have thought of that myself; only when I tell people . . .’

‘Look here, I say though,’ interrupted Eugenius, to whom Shakespeare’s friendliness and the burgundy had combined to restore his native impudence, ‘I say, Shakespeare, I do wish you’d tell us, I’m sure you won’t mind, but did you have a Warwickshire accent when you were a boy and . . .’

Shakespeare fairly broke into laughter. ‘Why, yes, I believe I had,’ he said. ‘For I remember that Henry—Wriothesley I mean—used to laugh at me about it at first, but I soon lost it after we—after I came to London and frequented great houses and met others of his friends. Their talk was very little different from yours, in accent and intonation I mean, though they used words which you have ceased to use, and used some that you use with a somewhat different meaning. But, look here, Eugenius, to use your own method of talk (for I will call you Eugenius, though you will not call me Will), look here, let me make this clear to you, that I am not come here to tell you anything of my life on earth that is not known already; no, nor of the life hereafter. For the first, because I do not choose. I have not kept myself to myself for so long now to make the years of my life on earth the common talk of men. Leave me to myself. *Secretum meum mihi*—I knew enough Latin for that, Yorick, even while I lived,’ and he smiled at me again.

‘I will not ask a word,’ I promised. ‘Nor shall Eugenius. But for the second, for the life hereafter, what of that? Why will you tell us nothing?’

Shakespeare’s face became graver as he looked at me before he answered. ‘I am disappointed in you, Yorick,’ he said, ‘for you should have seen plainly why, without my telling you. I might say again, because I do not choose; or I might say, because it is not permitted. Both would be true. But do you not see that, even if I chose, nay, even if it were permitted, I *could* not? Not because I could not tell, but

because you could not understand. Is it not plain to you that your mind could not receive what I might utter, and that no sense of yours, or of Eugenius' or of any mortal man alive, could apprehend the meaning of anything I might say? Your minds, and mine too while I lived, could only grasp mortal things, human things, finite things. Whatever I might try to say must be said in mortal words, in human language, and how should that convey to you any glimmering of understanding of the infinite?"

'But the mind of man can conceive infinity, can conceive eternity, has indeed conceived them,' I said stubbornly.

Shakespeare shook his head. 'No, no,' he said, and his eyes held mine. 'No, no, Yorick. The mind of man can conceive, has conceived the *idea* of something that he calls infinity, of something that he calls eternity; but all that he has conceived, all that his mind is conceived of is that space and time will cease to be. That space and time which to him, in this world, to his mortal senses, *seem* real may or will in some future state to which he may be raised be found to have been unreal, mere phantasms and conventions and trappings of mortality. Is that to conceive infinity? Is that to conceive eternity? And how far it is from *understanding* them!'

'Do you understand them now, Shakespeare?' suddenly demanded Eugenius, with almost an angry insistence. 'Are they *true*? Is there a life hereafter and is our little life not rounded by a sleep?'

I scowled at Eugenius, but Shakespeare only smiled as he answered him.

'True? True? Why, nothing else is true! What else should be true? Though you call yourself half a pagan, I think you know it and are only angry and impatient because you do not understand it. But I had not looked to hear you put those words into my mouth. I had thought, from what I have seen and heard of this book that you and Yorick are writing, that you two at least were not so foolish as to make the words I have put into the mouths of the creatures of my fancy the expression of my own beliefs. Indeed, it was partly your scorn of those who did that has induced my visit

to you. I should have thought it plain to all, in all I wrote, that I was at least a Christian man and believed in the immortality of the soul of man. Through all the follies and the weaknesses of my life on earth I never ceased to believe in that. Such doubts as I may have put into the mouths of my creatures I put into the mouths of doubters like Hamlet or magicians like Prospero or of men wholly (and not half) pagan, Eugenius. You at least will bear me out, Yorick.'

'Why, yes,' I said. 'It is plain enough. I could give a hundred instances to show that you believed. And so could Eugenius when he is not froward and impertinent.'

'I dare say I could,' laughed Eugenius. 'Why, you make even Malvolio think more nobly of the soul than Pythagoras. I am sorry,' he added more soberly, 'I did not mean to say you thought as Prospero because you let him say those words.'

'Why, then, that is well,' said Shakespeare. '“Our little life is rounded by a sleep”—why, it would be more true to say that man's little dream on earth is rounded by a life. But Prospero was a magician, and when a man dabbles in magic . . .' and Shakespeare spread his hands abroad and laughed. 'You ask me, Do I understand them *now*?' he went on. 'How should I? I have but late embarked upon the ocean of eternity and scarce touched the fringe of infinity.'

'How should I yet understand more than a very little? But I *know* them now to be, and do not merely *believe*, as I did while on earth, and as you must still until you die; and I have eternity before me in which to gather knowledge more and more; for that is what eternity is for, and that is what Heaven is—that that little spark of the immortal with which God made the soul of every man may grow to know Him more and more and, in knowing, more and more to love Him.'

'It can never attain to know Him all, never achieve knowledge complete and perfect; for how should the creature ever reach to the level of the Creator or be given to understand His mind from which everything came and of which his own soul is born? and, because he never can attain, there

must be eternity for him to grow in that wisdom and understanding and knowledge and love for ever and ever—for ever growing nearer.'

He paused for a moment, looking at us in turn as we sat silent, and then lifting his hands and letting them fall in a gesture of impotence.

'“Fringes of infinity”, “Beginnings of eternity”,’ he repeated. ‘See how I must use words that contradict themselves and mean nothing. What a poor thing is human language, that language of which I was reckoned a master—and perhaps sometimes in my vanity thought myself one. How little can it say! What trifles only can it express! “Understand?” I have all eternity in which to understand, and I never shall.’ His voice fell, but I heard him add, half to himself as it were, ‘“*Lo, these things are said in part of His ways, and seeing we have heard but a little drop of His word, who shall be able to behold the thunder of His greatness?*” You should read the Book of Job, Eugenius,’ he said, turning to him. ‘It has as much poetry in it as anything I ever wrote—and more wisdom. And ask me no more questions.’

‘I am sorry,’ said Eugenius humbly. ‘I forgot we were not to question you, and I thought that, as you had been dead, you know, for more than three hundred years, you must by now . . . I mean that you would perhaps tell us . . .’

‘Time ceased for me when I died, as it will for you,’ said Shakespeare shortly, ‘and it is a very few even of God’s saints, and God knows I was not one, who achieve Heaven at once. But I did not come to you to speak of these things or to be questioned of them, but in human friendliness and because you made it plain that you loved me.’

‘You spoke of our Book just now,’ I said. ‘Then you know what we have written?’

‘I know all that is written there without reading it,’ he said, looking at the pile of manuscript and smiling, ‘and I have listened to some of your talks, and . . .’

‘Then it was you we have heard, or seemed to hear and feel present?’ said Eugenius excitedly. ‘It was you who joined in my singing on New Year’s Eve, and you who said “Ducdame”, and you . . .’

'Yes,' said Shakespeare, 'and I was the February black-bird; and it was I, Yorick, who laid your book in the arm of your old apple-tree to-day. You should not have left me out on the grass.'

'I am sorry,' I said. 'It was forgetfulness. I am usually a respecter of books.'

'Do you like it? The Book, I mean,' Eugenius broke in. 'I hope you do. But we'd cut out anything you didn't like . . . wouldn't we, Yorick?'

'Please don't,' said Shakespeare. 'It is a book after my own heart—compound of sense and nonsense—and there is nothing in it to offend me. I thank God I was never one to take offence easily. Whether you should add another handful to the mountain of stuff they have written about me—not that I read them, but I cannot help but know . . .' he broke off, shrugging.

'I wish you would give us some token that you approve our labours,' I said, 'for I'm sure they won't believe, otherwise, that you came to us or that . . .'

'I will give you my "Imprimatur" if you wish. Give me pen and paper.' He laughed. 'It will be strange to write again.'

'I haven't a quill,' I said, 'but I hope you can manage with that.'

'Twill serve,' he said, looking at it, 'but do you write "Imprimatur" first and I will sign my name.'

So I took the pen again and wrote and handed it back, and he bent over the table and wrote his name with a flourish, Eugenius coming close and looking over his shoulder. 'That will remain,' he said, and handed the sheet to me, 'though I doubt I should not have done it.' And he sat again upon the table. 'But I love those who love me, and would not refuse you, Yorick.'

'I wish you'd write something for me,' said the irrepressible Eugenius. 'It's only fair. I've not asked any more questions, though I've been bursting to do it. Look here, I say, d'you know Matthew Arnold's sonnet?'

'I know Matthew Arnold,' said Shakespeare, 'as I know all poets, and consort with them more perhaps than with

others. We are all poets, in a sense, in Heaven, and poetry takes on another meaning; but it is natural that I should more especially greet my fellow poets as they come. There have been few of late. But what, Eugenius, about Matthew's sonnet? About me, you said? I do not call it to mind. Have you his poems here?'

Eugenius made to go to the bookcase to get Arnold's collected poems.

'Do not trouble,' said Shakespeare, 'I see the book.'

He sat, looking towards it for a moment. 'Oh yes, I know it now:

Others abide our question, Thou art free.

That's the one you mean? What about it, Eugenius?'

'Write something in answer,' said Eugenius boldly. 'Don't you think you ought to? He says quite good things about you.'

'Too good,' said Shakespeare, and sat silent for a little. 'Yes, I will write a sonnet in answer,' he said at last, 'but if you think, Eugenius, to discover secrets you will be disappointed, for I will make it a reprimand to all who do. Matthew Arnold was content and he abided, till we met where truth is and all is known. And so must you.'

He took a sheet of paper from the table and held it, looking at it, and I saw his lips move as if he were speaking to himself. Then he handed the sheet to Eugenius, and I could see that there was writing on it.

'Copy it out at once,' he said, 'if you wish to keep it, for *that* will not remain.'

Eugenius took the sheet and read it and handed it to me. This is what was written, as it seemed, in Shakespeare's cursive hand:

I would abide your question, for you knew  
The face of Beauty. Yes, I would abide  
To bare my heart to Poets: but I drew  
My fern-seed cloak about my life to hide  
What not concerns them from mean, prying eyes  
That only seek for offal and from men  
Who, like unnecessary, busy flies,  
Would have me play the eagle to their wren.

They have my Verse. What else I was is mine  
 And His Who made. I have not grudged my store,  
 But with both hands have poured for them my wine.  
 They who love wine will drink and ask no more.

*Secretum meum mihi*, for the rest:

I keep my Self locked up in my own breast.

I gave it back to Eugenius. 'Copy it out at once,' I said. 'Do what you are told.' So Eugenius took pen and paper and turned round to the table and began to write it out.

'I see you keep to what we call the Shakespearean form,' I said to Shakespeare.

'I did not know Petrarch's sonnets when I was alive,' he said. 'I could read but little Italian, though I should have learned more than I did when I . . . when I had the opportunity. But I was never in the sole company of Italians for long, save once for three months—but then I was in no state to learn. Many of my friends knew Italy and Italians well and could speak their language. Daniel was a great scholar and shamed me for my ignorance. French I could speak a little, but in truth I loved the society of men and their talk more than I loved books.'

'What were they all like? You can tell us that without telling us too much about yourself,' I said. 'I am not probing for secrets.'

'They were all very good fellows. A little quarrelsome some of them, but then I was never one to quarrel nor easy to quarrel with. You were right about that, Yorick. I take no merit for it. It seemed to me only that life was too short to waste in quarrelling, and I found good in all men. Dekker was always quarrelling, I remember, but he had a heart of gold. And he wrote very good plays, too.'

'Who wrote the best *poetry*?'

'Peele, I used to think, George Peele. But that may be because I read his verses when I was very young, and what poetry you read young you love most. I sought him out when I came to London. He was always in straits. He died too soon for me to be able to help him, except a little. But you should not ask me these things. The best poetry? The



greatest poet? Who can say? What might Marlowe not have done? Poor Kit—he might have been the greatest of us all. They all sang sweetly, or nearly all. And the seeming driest of them too. The wilderness would sometimes blossom like the rose. Would you have thought that he who wrote *Polyolbion* and dragged the cumbrous waggon of the *Barons' Wars* could have written *Nimphidia*, the Court of Fairy? Or that sonnet you quoted the other day? Or that . . .

'Oh, then Drayton did write that sonnet, did he, and not you?' said Eugenius, looking up from his writing.

'Oh yes, it is his,' said Shakespeare, smiling. 'I remember he read it to me when he wrote it. It is a good sonnet. There was, as I was saying, a well-spring in all of them, even the seeming driest. Even rugged Ben could warble at times, and Webster—perhaps the greatest of them all, though I did not know him—could write a lyric that I envied. I read it only just before I died.'

'“Call for the robin-redbreast and the wren”,’ I murmured.

'You have hit it. But now, my good friends and lovers, I must go. I leave you my good wishes, and if books must be written about me, let them be like yours. For even in Heaven we love to be loved.'

He held out a hand to each of us, as when he came, and as we each of us grasped and held it for a little moment—he was there no more.

There was a long silence as we stood, each of us, staring. Then I looked at the sheets lying on the table where Eugenius had been copying. The one that had seemed to hold Shakespeare's cursive script was blank, but the copy in Eugenius's hand was there.

'Was that real, Eugenius?' I asked.

'Real? Real? Of course it was!' he answered me, almost angrily. 'Didn't we both see him and hear him? Didn't I feel the warmth of his hand—and you too? *Real!* Why . . .'

'Yes, I know. But it *might* be—I mean, we have both for so long been thinking and talking Shakespeare—almost *living* him—that we might be imagining, it might have been a . . .

'To *both* of us?' Eugenius interrupted. 'Don't be absurd, Yorick!'

He was plainly very much moved as he stood staring at the sheet he had written; so I said no more. 'Anyway, *I* shall believe!' he said at last, and, turning, went swiftly out of the room.

THE END

## Appendix I

### SHAKESPEARE EXAMINATION PAPER

*for reasonably advanced students*

1. Give the references to all the dogs mentioned in the plays, whether by name or merely as dogs; and deduce, from these references, whether Shakespeare was (a) a lover of dogs (and bitches), (b) a hater of them, or (c) indifferent on the subject.

Deduce from a certain reference to a lady-dog (who was also a lady's dog) in one of the plays that Shakespeare was acquainted with the Erse as well as the Welsh language.

2. Explain, with reference to the context, the following words, terms, expressions, and sentences: 'Miching mallecho'; 'Ducdame'; 'Old Utis'; 'Passimenter's Passim'; 'As odious as the word Occupy'; 'sleeve'; 'Rivo'; 'As dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage'; 'Fern-seed'; 'Tewkesbury mustard'; 'Althea's dream'; 'the fig of Spain'; 'a wilderness of monkeys'; 'Impetico thy gratility'; 'farcéd title'; 'Dian's bud'; 'a thing enskied and sainted'; 'that I am freely dissolved and dissolutely'; 'this senior-junior, giant-dwarf'; 'I do bite my thumb'; 'honorificabilitudinitatibus'; 'like to a censer in a barber's shop'; 'The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo'; 'I had as lief be a Brownist as a politician'; 'Pigrogomitus of the Vapians'; 'Saint Cupid, then! and soldiers to the field!'; 'and hang a calf-skin on those recreant limbs'; 'Dyeing Scarlet'; 'Convey the wise it call'; 'A star danced and I was born'.

3. (a) Of what colour was the Dauphin's horse?

(b) For how long and by what clock did Falstaff engage Hotspur?

(c) Who, riding at top speed, was reputed to be able to kill a flying sparrow with a pistol?

(d) What similarities exist between Macedon and Monmouth?

(e) Assuming Glendower's invocational speed to have been 300 words per minute, calculate (to three points of decimals) how many familiar devils (Welsh or other) he was able to conjure up.

(f) How many spots has the bell of a cowslip. Quote as many lines as you know to show that Shakespeare knew. Give references.

## APPENDIX I

(g) What, calculated from the circumference of the earth, was Puck's speed m.p.h.? Supposing that Puck and the fastest modern jet-plane should start to circumnavigate the globe in opposite directions, the one from Vladivostok and the other from Heathrow at the same time, where would they pass each other? Compare the flying speed of Puck and Ariel. Quote any lines which suggest that Ariel was probably the faster of the two.

(h) What are the respective values of a 'remuneration' and a 'guerdon'? To whom were they respectively given, by whom, in what play, and for what services?

4. Give a complete list of the characters or *dramatis personæ* of any five plays of Shakespeare you choose.

5. What character (and in what play) has the shortest part; appears only once (and that in a stage direction); and says nothing—and yet is essential to the plot?

6. It has been said that 'the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is not the same Falstaff as the Falstaff of *Henry IV*, but manifestly inferior'.

Discuss this dictum. If you agree and conclude that *The Merry Wives* was not Shakespeare's, but somebody else's, what ground do you think there is for supposing that it was written by the Virgin Queen?

7. Prove by quotations that Mistress Quickly was the prototype of Mrs. Malaprop and the Fool in *Lear* the precursor of Sam Weller.

8. Quote the first *two* lines of each of the songs and lyrics scattered through the plays.

Name, in each case, the play in which it occurs.

9. Compare Shakespeare's villains with those of other Elizabethan dramatists, particularly Webster's: e.g. Iago and Edmund with Bosola and Flamineo.

Draw any conclusions you like—or none.

10. Did Shakespeare smoke tobacco or take snuff? Support your conclusion by quotations—or the absence of them. If your answer is in the negative, do you think there are sufficient grounds for suggesting that Shakespeare (or Bacon), and not James I, wrote the *Counterblaste to Tobacco*?

11. In view of Professor Dover Wilson's recent epoch-making book about Falstaff, discuss the alternative theory (recently adumbrated by a disciple of the late Professor Friederich Max-Muller) that

Falstaff was intended by Shakespeare as a sun-myth, he being clearly the central figure and all the other characters satellites revolving round him.

Taking as your text Prince Hal's hypothetical suggestion that the blessed sun himself might be 'a fair round wench in flame-coloured taffeta' with whom Falstaff would have had amorous relations, endeavour to identify the other characters in *Henry IV* as the attendant planets: e.g. Jupiter, Prince Hal; Venus, Doll Tearsheet; Mars, Pistol; Mercury, Nym; Saturn, Bardolph; etc.

Support your conclusions with equally convincing arguments.

12. Name all, or as many as you can remember, of Shakespeare's Fools, Clowns, and Jesters, stating the plays in which they respectively are to be found.

Distinguish, as nicely as you can, between those who are Jesters or Gentlemen-Clowns; Clowns simple; Fools; or Comic Serving-men.

Does Shakespeare's intimate understanding of and obvious liking for and sympathy with Fools and Jesters in your view throw any light on the Baconian controversy? And, if so, what? Is there any ground for supposing that Shakespeare himself ever held the position of a Jester? Give quotations.

13. Identify: 'that stale, old, moth-eaten, dry cheese'; 'bolthutch of beastliness'; 'old Truepenny'; 'rump-fed ronyon'; 'ye giddy goose'; 'this Triton of the minnows'; 'sleeve of Troy'; 'thou half-penny purse of wit, thou pigeon-egg of discretion'; 'dog fox'; 'Flibbertigibbet'; 'long purples'; 'you base football player'; 'Susan, Grindstone and Nell; Anthony and Potpan'; 'Lychorida'; 'mailed Bacchus'; 'Mars his idiot'; 'detested parasites, courteous destroyers, affable wolves, meek bears, fools of fortune, trencher friends, time's flies, cap and knee slaves, vapours, and minute-jacks'; 'Jockey of Norfolk, Dickon thy master'; 'thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket'; 'Tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide'; 'Monsieur Basimecu'; 'the imperial votaress'; 'a slight, unmeritable man, fit to be sent on errands'; 'a Cotsole man'; 'a morsel cold upon dead Cæsar's trencher'; 'Robin Nightwork'; 'a forked radish'; 'Fidele'; 'Lavatch'; 'a whale to virginity'; 'Euriphile'; 'Doctor Pinch'; 'Cesario'; 'the wise woman of Brentford'; 'Hugh Oatcake and George Seacoal'; 'Crab'; 'Sycorax'; 'Old Double'; 'Mistress Ursula'; 'Tray, Blanch and Sweetheart'.

14. Give a list, as complete as you can, of the inns, taverns, and alehouses mentioned in Shakespeare's plays; and of their respective hosts and hostesses. What was the price of sack at the Boar's Head?

Show, if you can, by references and quotations, that though Shakespeare seems to have restricted his characters to the drinking of sack or of small ale, he himself was acquainted with other wines.

15. Trace, as exactly as you can, Falstaff's itinerary from London to Shrewsbury field, with his company of foot. Explain, if possible by references in *Henry IV*, why he took so roundabout a route—especially as he was on foot.

16. What, in your view, was Falstaff's parentage, education, and general background?

Endeavour to show, by references and quotation, that he must have been (*a*) of very good family and position; (*b*) brought up piously as a good Christian Catholic; (*c*) no coward and a proper man of his hands from youth upwards; (*d*) no mean swordsman, even in his old age; (*e*) show how he became so intimately acquainted with Prince Hal.

What do you think actually happened after the exploit at Gad's Hill?

In Act III, Sc. 3, *Henry IV*, Part I, Falstaff asks the Prince for news—

‘for the robbery, lad—how is that answered?’

*P. Hen.* O, my sweet beef, I must still be good angel to thee—  
 . . . the money is paid back again’,

and pretends that everything is right. Show, however, from other references in *Henry IV*, Part 2, and in *Henry V*, that it was not all settled as easily as that.

What did Falstaff do with the £1000 he borrowed from Justice Shallow?

NOTE.—For a Pass Degree only 8 out of these 16 questions need be answered, but Nos. 2, 13, and 16 must be attempted.

No prizes are offered for the best answers, but if the demand should seem to justify the cost of compilation and printing, a crib will be supplied by the Publishers to purchasers of the book, at the nominal price of 2s. 6d. plus postage.

## Appendix II

### IMPROVING ON THORPE

The following rearrangement of 126 of the Sonnets does not pretend to recover the order in which they were written (whether this be important or not), but only to provide an order that presents some continuity of thought, and outlines the story of a friendship. In 1609 Thomas Thorpe perhaps set himself the same task, and probably had no better means for achieving it than we have to-day, namely, the contents of the sonnets themselves. Francis Meres, in 1599, wrote of unpublished sonnets by Shakespeare 'among his private friends'. Copies would pass from hand to hand in the way then usual, each collector acquiring those which he especially admired. Ten years later Thorpe printed 'Shakespeare's Sonnets'. He may have gathered them in varying numbers at different times and from many quarters. Out of the general mass he put together two or three larger groups of sonnets obviously connected by their subject-matter (Persuasion to marry, Rival poets), and was able to find a good many briefer runs of two to four sonnets. But the rest is confusion; and even within such groups he gave too little consideration to sequence of thought, often using for clue a single line instead of the drift and tone of a whole poem. Thorpe, if his plans were becoming known, would be in a hurry to get his 'venture' through the press. Anybody who thinks the 1609 order bad or not Shakespeare's (the two judgements can hardly be separated), may reasonably construct his own. It is much better fun than crosswords. *Eugenius.*

I. AFFECTION DECLARED. (i) *The Poet's inspiration*: 26, 23, 38, 24, 54, 81; (ii) *Time's masterpiece*: 106, 59, 53, 20, 67, 68; (iii) *The emulations of love*: 113, 114, 62, 22, 37, 39.

II. THE YOUTH URGED TO MARRY. (i) *For the world's sake*: 18, 15, 16, 17, 1, 4; (ii) *For love's sake*: 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10; (iii) *For his own sake*: 13, 7, 2, 11, 12, 14.

III. THE ENEMIES OF BEAUTY. (i) *Time threatens*: 64, 65, 60, 19, 55, 63; (ii) *Death cuts off*: 73, 74, 71, 72, 66, 146; (iii) *Corruption creeps in*: 94, 129, 69, 95, 96, 70.

## APPENDIX II

IV. LOVE IN ABSENCE. (i) *The pains of parting*: 50, 51, 27, 61, 48, 28; (ii) *Bonds in separation*: 43, 46, 47, 30, 31, 29; (iii) *Reunion in autumn*: 44, 45, 97, 98, 99, 104.

V. SWEETS GROWN COMMON. (i) *Apology for past silence*: 100, 101, 102, 52, 109, 75; (ii) *Neglects and complaints*: 56, 58, 57, 76, 108, 105; (iii) *A defence of the Simple Muse*: 103, 21, 84, 78, 32, 82.

VI. JEALOUSIES AND REPROACHES. (i) *Rival poets*: 79, 80, 86, 85, 83, 87; (ii) *Threatened breach*: 49, 89, 88, 90, 91, 92; (iii) *A charge of disloyalty*: 93, 33, 34, 40, 41, 42.

VII. FRIENDSHIP AT THE PROOF. (i) *Forgiveness and self-accusations*: 35, 36, 111, 121, 112, 25; (ii) *Calumnies and errors*: 125, 124, 122, 117, 118, 120; (iii) *Renewal of love*: 110, 119, 115, 123, 107, 116.

(Number 77 is omitted as being 'occasional', sent with a gift; Number 126 as being a twelve-line envoi to some section of the Sonnets. In place of these Numbers 129 and 146 are brought in from the later sonnets. Of these, six, 128, 130, 138, 145, 153-4, appear to be disconnected *jeux d'esprit*. That leaves twenty Sonnets for the 'Dark Lady' series. They might be read in the following order: *Affection scorned*, 127, 132, 143, 134, 133, 136, 135; *Passion thwarted*, 131, 152, 148, 141-2, 151, 147; *The slave of sense*, 149, 139, 140, 150, 137, 144.)





